

WITHDRAWN

in

1964

WITHDRAWN

B

F632j

5915

c.1

Jackson, Frances.

The life of Madame Flore.

ORATORY OF ST. ALPHONSE
REDEMPTORISTINE NUNS
LIBRARY, MISSOURI

THE LIFE OF MADAME FLORE

921

Nilhil obstat.

EDUARDUS CAROLUS HALPIN, O.P.,
Censor deputatus.

Imprimi potest.

✠ GULIELMUS,
EPISCOPUS ARINDELENSIS,
Vicarius Generalis.

WESTMONASTERII,
die 29 Oct. 1907.



MADAME FLORE AT THE AGE OF 65.

[Frontispiece.]

THE LIFE OF MADAME FLORE

SECOND SUPERIOR-GENERAL
OF THE "LADIES OF MARY"

TRANSLATED AND ABRIDGED BY

FRANCES JACKSON

AUTHOR OF

"From Hearth to Cloister in the Reign of Charles II."

NO LONGER THE PROPERTY OF

ST. MARY'S JUNIOR COLLEGE LIBRARY
O'FALLON, MISSOURI

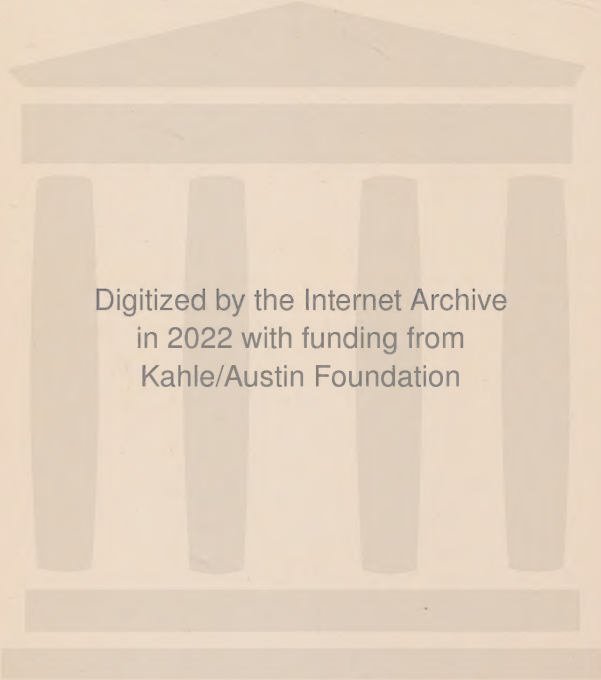
921
JA

SANDS & CO.

EDINBURGH: 21 HANOVER STREET

LONDON: 23 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND

1908



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

“Joseph and Mary shall be my guides. I will exercise authority over my pupils as they did over the Child Jesus. I will win them by my prayers, my patience, my ceaseless and untiring devotion. When I punish them, I will remember that I deserve reproof more than they ; yet I will not fail to correct them, and I will do it without softness, for in spite of my unworthiness, my office requires it of me.”

MADAME FLORE.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

A FEW years ago, I reproduced in modern English, the life of one who became a Poor Clare in the seventeenth century—the Lady Warner; and now, I lay before the reader the very different life of a nun in the nineteenth century—Madame Flore, of the Institute known as the “Ladies of Mary.”¹ The two nuns were alike in their unswerving love of their vocation, in their steadfastness of purpose, and, above all, in their devotion to Christ: “What have I done for Thee, O merciful Redeemer, and what can I do!” is the cry of Lady Warner, and Madame Flore takes it up joyously: “All for God! All for Jesus crucified! Hail Jesus! Hail the Cross!” [Vive Jésus! Vive la croix!]

¹ In 1838 the *Institute of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph* was divided into two branches, the *Sisters of St Joseph* and the *Ladies of Mary*, in order that the one might devote themselves chiefly to the education of the poor, and the other to that of girls of a higher class. In the Constitutions of the Institute the *Ladies of Mary* are still called the *Daughters of Mary and Joseph*.

The strange vicissitudes and severe penance of Lady Warner's short life have, however, no counterpart in the even tenor of Madame Flore's seventy years. The child of Catholic parents, Flore Delhaye entered her Convent at the age of sixteen, and, having passed through the novitiate, was appointed, while yet scarcely eighteen, to open a new school at Alost, where we find her exerting herself to provide healthy recreation for the pupils ; later, as the young Prioress at Mouscron, she ruled her Convent in peace during the troubled year of 1848, when the air resounded with the call to arms, and the ground shook with distant firing ; finally, after holding another appointment, she was elected Superior-General, and twice afterwards re-elected. We see her admitting postulants, watching over the novices, tending the sick, following with sympathy the career of her former pupils, and comforting them in their troubles ; driving the Sister-Econome to bay with her "investments" in charity, rebuilding Convents, and founding others, including two in England.¹

¹ At Scarborough and at Croydon (West). It is hoped that another Convent may shortly be opened in South Croydon. The site is secured, and the plans are in hand.

At the present time, when the thoughts of many are turned to the question of denominational education, this narrative acquires a special interest, for here we trace, almost from its foundation, the growth of an Institute designed expressly to promote the holiness of its members, and the *Christian education of children*. Canon Van Crombrugghe, the Founder, was the spiritual Father and adviser of Madame Flore ; and it was during her term of office that the rules received their final approval from the newly elected Pope, Leo XIII. We observe with what care the nuns were trained under the Canon's direction, in order that they might be fitted for their task, and with what enthusiasm they fulfilled it. Madame Flore reserved to herself the privilege of teaching the Catechism to the girls ; for thirty years she discharged this duty, and when her last term of office expired, she begged, as a special favour, to be allowed to continue the work. How great was her influence for good in moulding the characters of the many girls who passed under her care, the reader of these pages will judge.

FRANCES JACKSON.

4th October 1907.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. EARLY LIFE	I
II. AS A NOVICE AT MOUSCRON	14
III. AT ALOST (HEADMISTRESS)	27
IV. AT MOUSCRON (PRIORESS)	47
V. AT COLOMA (MISTRESS-GENERAL OF THE INSTITUTE)	82
VI. SUPERIOR-GENERAL, FIRST TERM OF OFFICE, 1858-1867	95
VII. SUPERIOR-GENERAL, SECOND TERM OF OFFICE, 1867-1876	155
VIII. SUPERIOR-GENERAL, THIRD TERM OF OFFICE, 1876-1885	186
IX. ILLNESS AND DEATH OF MADAME FLORE, AUGUST 1885 TO 9TH FEBRUARY 1886	229

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

MADAME FLORE AT THE AGE OF 65 . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
CANON VAN CROMBRUGGHE . . .	<i>Face page</i> 6
CONVENT OF THE LADIES OF MARY, ALOST . . .	„ 26
CONVENT OF THE LADIES OF MARY AT MOUSCRON—THE PARK . . .	„ 46
COLOMA (BELGIUM)—MOTHER-HOUSE OF THE LADIES OF MARY . . .	„ 82
COLOMA, WITH THE LAKE . . .	„ 86
CONVENT OF THE LADIES OF MARY AT MOUSCRON . . .	„ 152
MADAME CECILIA (FOUNDRRESS OF THE HOUSES OF THE LADIES OF MARY IN ENGLAND) ON HER 78TH BIRTHDAY . . .	„ 160
CONVENT OF THE LADIES OF MARY, COLOMA, CROYDON . . .	„ 166
COLOMA—THE RUINS IN THE GROUNDS . . .	„ 198
CHAPEL OF THE CONVENT AT SCARBOROUGH . . .	„ 208
PLAYGROUND—CONVENT OF THE LADIES OF MARY, COLOMA, CROYDON . . .	„ 222

THE LIFE OF MADAME FLORE

I

EARLY LIFE

MADAME FLORE, the youngest daughter of Auguste Delhay, a devout and upright man, was born 25th February 1816, at Tongres-notre-Dame, a village in Hainault; she had two brothers, Nestor, who survived her, and Ferdinand, and three sisters, Adèle, Aline, and Bathilde, of whom the two elder married, the third, Bathilde, entered the Institute of the Ladies of Mary a few years before her sister Flore, and died there at the early age of twenty-three.

Madame Flore was fond of speaking in praise of her mother, whose name before her marriage was Marie-Thérèse de Lannoy: "My mother was never idle" (she would say); "she always taught me to look upon my work

as my merit before God, and a pleasure to myself." Her example and counsel remained deeply engraved on the memory of all her children, and, in the case of Flore, early led her to form those habits of generosity and courage which distinguished her later ; when, in after years, Madame Flore had become Superior-General of the Institute, she still looked back with gratitude upon her mother's teaching.

At the age of six, she was taken by her mother to church, and when she was ten years old she made her first Communion. During the preceding Retreat she had discovered some of her faults of character ; one was stubbornness of will ; when she had formed some childish project, she clung to it with a tenacity bordering on obstinacy, and this sometimes led to passages at arms with her brothers ; another fault was extreme susceptibility ; when her self-love was wounded, she became sullen, and sometimes would spend hours crying in a corner, and neither the caresses nor the merry talk of her brothers could restore her cheerfulness ; her family gave her the name of "the sensitive plant." It was also at the time of her first Communion that her love of mortification first awoke, and she admitted later, that

since that time, she had never passed a Saturday without secretly practising some kind of abstinence in honour of our Blessed Lady. A task very dear to the little Flore was that of mending the Altar linen of the village church: "My mother," she relates, "was pitiless to my childish sewing. How many times must I begin it over again, and when I showed impatience, she spurred me on, saying, 'Here is a little lady who would like to offer to the good God work badly done!'" This training was providential, for, some twenty years later, it fell to her lot to unite the house at Coloma to the "Association of the Blessed Sacrament, and Work for Poor Churches."

As we have said, she had an elder sister, named Bathilde, a girl of singularly earnest character, who no sooner had tasted the pleasures of society than she recognised their worthlessness: "Everything I saw and heard was a sad revelation to me, and I accounted those to be very wise and very happy who sought refuge in solitude, exchanging the shadow for reality, and founding all their happiness on God."

Having recognised the call of the Divine Master, Bathilde did not hesitate, she disengaged

her life from earth, and directed it to God. "My sister's project was received with bitter reproaches," Flore relates; "she was accused of disappointing the hopes of her parents, who had looked forward to her marriage."

The loss of Bathilde was a deep grief to Flore; for months she was inconsolable, and fears were even entertained for her health. "At last," she tells us, "a ray of hope dawned. Why should not I be called to the same vocation as my sister? I too was passionately fond of study; I too thirsted for immortality and for the infinite. Could the work of the Divine Spirit, Who had put into our hearts so many points of resemblance, be contradictory here?" These were no mere vague aspirations; Flore knew that this germ of grace must be watered by prayer and the practice of virtue, and she strove to render her life more perfect, adopting some of the customs followed in religious houses. At this time a temptation threatened to arrest her progress. Diffident as she was, she asked herself very seriously what the religious life could ever make of her; then again, could she, who was so susceptible, ever bring herself to accept the humiliations which must necessarily come to

her ; at last she thrust aside all idea of being a nun, believing that this promised land was open only to the more worthy.

Soon, however, the desire for a more perfect life returned. Hungering like her sister for that which does not pass away, she could not remain content as she was, or throw away her heart on trifles.

Meanwhile, letters arrived from Bathilde, telling her mother of the holy joys of the religious life, and how the Convent was all—more than all—she had hoped for. “I secretly possessed myself of Bathilde’s letters,” Flore relates, “and took refuge in some solitary place to read them. How strangely they influenced me! I know not what virtue seemed to come out of them. To belong to God was a thought so great, that I could see nothing beyond. I promised the Lord, if He would accept my vows, that I would be, not merely a nun of some kind, but a nun in the highest meaning of the word ; I would give myself to Him fully and freely, without casting one glance aside, or one look back.”

A visit to Bathilde followed ; Flore had never before stayed at a Convent, and was touched by the order and harmony that

reigned. Everything she saw seemed to her more perfect than in the world, as if a heavenly atmosphere pervaded the house. Yet she came to no definite decision at this time, and it is even doubtful whether she confided her project to her sister.

During a second visit she met Canon Van Crombrugghe, the Founder of the Institute known as the Ladies of Mary. This experienced priest soon discerned the signs of a call to the religious life in the soul thus providentially brought to him, while Flore, on her side, felt at once at her ease with him.

"I told him my doubts," she relates, "the difficulties which I foresaw in my faults of character, and at the same time my love of retirement, and of work, and my distaste for society. I naïvely confided to him that sometimes I envied the lot of St Simon Stylites, who made a dwelling-place for himself in mid-air, and did not even touch the earth with his feet. I placed myself in the Canon's hands, as if I had been a child, with a confidence that surprised even myself, and begged him to decide for me."

"My importunity touched him; but with characteristic prudence he would have nothing



CANON VAN CROMBRUGGHE,

[To face page 6.]

done hurriedly. Taking leave of me, he gave me his blessing, and bade me keep him informed of my dispositions, assuring me that he would remember me daily in his Mass."

Three months had scarcely passed when she humbly begged admission to the Institute. The reply was sent through Bathilde: "God be praised, my child, I have just received news of your dear sister: she wishes to become a nun. It is a great satisfaction to me to tell her, through you, that I will receive her as a postulant in our Institute . . . where you will have the happiness of being united in time, while waiting to be united in eternity."

Flore received the news with deep emotion; henceforth she saw nothing but light and happiness before her. It cost her little to separate herself from the world, but much to separate from her own family. No one suspected her intention. They noticed that she was graver than usual, and sometimes sad; but who is not sad sometimes? When Madame Delhayé talked to her of Bathilde, recalling events of the childhood they had passed together, it never entered her thoughts that her other daughter would embrace the same way of life; and when, after one of these con-

versations, Flore, deeply moved and trembling, told her of her decision, her mother broke into sobs; she was overwhelmed by the sacrifice that God required of her. Soon, however, her courage returned, and she announced her intention of, herself, taking her daughter to the Convent.

The following details have been given by Flore's sister Aline :—

“It had been agreed that before parting we should all meet together for a last meal. This project was carried out, and we sat down around the family table. . . . The one who felt it most was our brother Ferdinand, Flore's godfather, with whom she had been most closely associated; like her, he hungered and thirsted after justice, and they had often opened their hearts to one another with regard to their desire of perfection. He was sitting next to his god-child, and tried to talk to her, but stopped every moment to clear his voice. Our brother Nestor showed cheerfulness and vivacity for us all. The evening before, he had been teasing Flore about the austerities of the Convent; to-day he forbore, saying he wished to weigh his words, and not to say or do anything at this last meeting that our most

scrupulous sister could not afterwards remember with pleasure. He spoke in jest, but it was none the less true that we all had a feeling of reverence for this sister, predestined to virginity. . . . Our eldest brother had been asked to say a few words of farewell to Flore in the name of the family. He had scarcely begun, when he broke down; our father finished the speech; he wished the future postulant, not earthly joys, but the perfect fulfilment of her new duties; for we all held the religious life in very high esteem, understanding, though doubtless very imperfectly, its excellence and advantages."

The Feast of St Flora (24th November) was the day fixed for departure; and many of the people of the little town lined the road eager to take a last loving look at the girl who had grown up among them.

On arriving at the Convent at Mouscron, Madame Delhaye's first care was to visit the chapel; afterwards Flore was presented to the community, who were touched by her youth and modesty, she was then not quite seventeen; as for Bathilde, it is impossible to describe her joy,—this time they were reunited for ever.

Soon after Flore's arrival, Canon Van

Crombrugghe interested himself in her welfare. He writes to Bathilde :—

“I am glad to hear that our dear Flore is among us. The enemy of salvation will not cease his efforts to prevent this soul attaining perfection. Watch over her, but without anxiety or fear.”

The thoughts and feelings of Flore at this time may be gathered from her notes and letters :—“I most humbly thank Thee, my God, for having called me to the practice of Thine evangelical counsels. Nothing that I can say would express my happiness. . . .” In a letter to the Canon she bravely faces her new life :—

“Sometimes I feel a little difficulty, but *fiat*. I say it every time I am crossed or wearied, every time I have to make a sacrifice. I would not be a coward ; I would not fail in what God asks of me ; and what is it, after all, in comparison with the blessings attached to my sublime vocation !”

Again : “I do not say that nothing costs me an effort. My heart often sinks when I think of my mother, my family, and all belonging to me ; but we must pay in full the tithe on our happiness, we must kiss both

sides of the medal. I never imagined that the life of a nun could be otherwise. . . . It is in the path of love that I mean to walk. I will often remind myself that love is generous, that it is free and burning as a flame, that it bears patiently spiritual dryness. Should I not be ashamed to be the bride of a crucified God, and to shrink from suffering?"

Again, in a letter to the Canon, she writes : "Of all the spiritual exercises you have recommended to me, Reverend Father, the one that I like the best is to make Jesus Christ reign in my heart, to regard Him as living, and to act from love of Him. The habit of uplifting my heart is still wanting to me, I am striving to practise it ; when I go to the classes I will say : 'My God, I am going whither it is Thy will to call me.'"

Another letter reveals a more troubled state of mind. Flore suffered sometimes from unaccountable sadness : "The arrival of your letter, Reverend Father, was providential ; it came to remind me of your good advice, and of my resolutions. God does not reign in a sad and troubled heart. Then He did not reign in mine when I wrote to you. Forgive me for not having been faithful to my resolutions."

In the early years of the Congregation, it was customary for the novices who were destined to become teachers, to make their preparatory studies at the school; this was at once a change of occupation, and an apprenticeship in their future duties. One of the pleasures of these student-novices was to write essays on literary subjects set by Canon Van Crombrughe, to whom the essays were submitted for criticism. This was Flore's favourite occupation. She looked upon the Canon as a father, and as Christ's representative, and, though her compositions were often models of style, she valued them as a means of making her thoughts known to him, and of drawing rules for the guidance of her life from his wise spiritual direction. In one of his letters he writes: "It is only too true, my dear daughter, that God is little loved, and I am not surprised that this reflection should have caused you to shed tears; but we must not rest satisfied with feeling, our dear Flore must resolve to imitate and serve the generous Spouse to whom she desires to be united; she must show the Christ in herself, she must triumph over her passions and personal feelings by the power of Christ—then she will become an

instrument of mercy for the salvation of many."

We notice here the hopes which the Founder of the Congregation cherished with regard to this young postulant, who seemed to begin where the others ended. As he thus watched over her, tending her like a precious plant, he feared the effect of overwork, or the severity of the winter upon her youth and delicate health; above all, he was anxious to guard her from melancholy: "Counsel Flore to be cheerful; sadness eats into the heart, and injures the soul; let her live in the sunshine of God."

II

AS A NOVICE AT MOUSCRON

ON the 11th April 1833, Flore was clothed, and on the same day Bathilde was professed. The ceremony was public, and Madame Delhayé and her two sons were present.

The habit was a source of joy and wonder to the young novice. "Can it be you, Sister Flore," she exclaims, "you so unworthy, with this white band on your forehead, this veil, this sweet name of Mary [embroidered] on your breast! All these symbols, forerunners of the wonderful union to which God invites you." And naïvely, ardently, she gave herself up to the contemplation of her new life, seeing the years unroll in an ever-increasing love of Him whom she had chosen as her portion.

She has told us that in those early days she could never pass a mirror without looking in it to see the effect of her religious habit, turn-

ing from side to side with unaffected pleasure, and regarding it as the emblem of virginity.

There was little difference of occupation between the postulate and the novitiate; in both, study and work alternated with spiritual exercises. According to the custom of novices in all ages, Flore had to wash the dishes, to sweep, to help the Sisters in their domestic duties. Outwardly this was all, but with what fervour she did these things! One of her fellow-novices, who survived her, thus writes: "She took everything in good part; she did not complain of cold, or heat, or work, or anything. She was particularly sensitive to the beauties of nature. From one of the windows there was a view of a vast extent of country with few houses; here and there we saw some one passing along the lonely paths, or a few labourers at work. There were beautiful trees, a far-distant horizon, and golden grain clothing the hill-sides. Flore regarded it with delight: 'Oh, how beautiful!' she said, and her soul became lost in prayer and contemplation."

She herself has left the following description of her novitiate: "I have still fresh in my mind the good impressions of that time. I remember

even the least rules of our daily life. Above the fireplace in our workroom—we had no novitiate hall¹ in those days—a time-table was posted up; it was our order of the day, and all our duties were marked on it; breakfast at 7.10; work in the schoolroom at 8; reading at 11.15; the mid-day office, etc. Then came the details of work—the darning of stockings assigned to one novice, sweeping to another; everything had been foreseen, marked, and arranged, so that I had only to go by this monastic chronometer to be a daughter of exact observance. After dinner our time was divided between manual work and attendance at certain classes; the intervals were consecrated to prayer. There was one article of our programme that we would not have exchanged for any other, the reading at 11.15. We were then reading *Agnès du St-Amour*, a musty old book of the time of St Francis of Sales, which really entertained us. We read in turn, and I well remember our admiration when the fervent Agnes in one morning seized thirty opportunities to mortify herself! However, accustomed as we were to the Watch and Pray of the Gospel, we were not far

¹ “Salle de Noviciat,” usually called simply “the Novitiate.”

behind her. The most vivid of all my recollections is that of our monthly Retreats. The month had not always been good; we had committed some fault, failed in some point of our rule, the importance of which had been explained to us; the Retreat restored us to fervour; we came out of it furnished with new weapons, and a burning zeal which put to flight the spirit of darkness."

One of her fellow-novices writes: "Something of Flore's fervour was communicated to us; so great was our eagerness for religious instruction, our desire to die to ourselves, our fear of offending God. At the very name of Jesus, we would have embraced everything, undertaken everything, plunged into every sacrifice. Happily, there was some one at hand to hold us in check, or I know not whither we should have been carried by our indiscreet fervour."

One who was dear to the novitiate at that time, and not without influence on Flore's training, was "the good Carnin." No one ever knew who this good Carnin was, about whom so many legends had been woven. Outwardly she seemed to belong to the working-class, but she was one who had

learned much of holy things, who did not reason about God, but recognised Him as her Lord and Master, and served Him as such. According to imperfectly preserved traditions, some member of her family had fallen a victim to the French Revolution, and this had led her to look back upon that time with a detestation that marred her otherwise kindly disposition; it was indeed the only hatred in her heart. When the rule permitted, the novices, and Flore in particular, would have long talks with Carnin, from whom they learned much about past events. They heard her speak of the sack of the churches, of the breaking of the images of the good God; of the time when everything was turned upside down, and church bells were melted to make cannon and penny pieces.¹

Notwithstanding the respect and affection which Carnin inspired—this living relic of a past age—she was at times a sore trial of patience to the young Sisters. She had charge of the refectory, and it was the duty of the novices to help her. To work was nothing,

¹ During the Reign of Terror, Carnin had been caretaker of an unfurnished house belonging to a pious association, which afterwards became the Convent of the Ladies of Mary at Mouscron.

but to work with Carnin! To do slowly and minutely with her what they could have done three times over without her. Only Flore could stand it long; and while her companions, zealous and fervent on many another occasion, vanished as soon as the white cornette came in sight, Flore helped her to the end, attentive, obliging, serving her with so much good-will that one would have thought she enjoyed it. Hence, she became a great friend of Carnin, who called her her "angel"; the others were "not much good," or even "no good at all!"

To relieve the monotony of their daily life, they were allowed during the holidays to lead the singing in the chapel. Flore's voice was not very good, but her zeal was aroused by anything connected with religion, and she was most diligent in choir-practice.¹

This was the ideal. There was also the practical side, for Mother Marianne loved the novices, and would not let them languish in idleness. They had to keep in order the

¹ All her life Madame Flore preserved her love for the religious chant. Often when the nuns were working together, they suddenly heard her begin to intone the Litany of Our Lady, the Magnificat, etc. She was not in the least disconcerted by her daughter's smiles, but went on bravely to the end.

refectory, the community-room, the sacristy, in fact all the rooms occupied by the nuns. But the culminating point was blacking the shoes. Flore seized the basket, and prompt at work as at prayer, quickly finished her task, and offered her services to her companions, bringing to their outbursts of merriment, the counterpoise of a gravity beyond her years. Prayer accompanied the work ; a Pater for the Pope, a Pater for the Bishop, a Pater for the Institute, a Pater for such and such intention according to the needs of the time.

“I still seem to hear,” one of Flore’s companions writes, “the ‘ora pro nobis’ more or less accentuated according to the muscular effort. It was no wonder that our white veils did not always come out spotless from the ordeal. At each new smudge, a new burst of laughter, and a new torment for Flore, who in some way felt responsible for us. Then invariably a door would open, and the kind and patient face of Mother Marianne was framed in the doorway. Hush! Hush! It was the call to order.”

In spite of these little digressions—common to novitiates everywhere and in all ages—our little company taken as a whole was edifying.

They forgot themselves cheerfully, lived in charity, fervour, and self-denial, and strove with their whole energy to bring their will into subjection to the holy will of God.

Flore was not one to think that her work was over when once she had taken the veil. No novice showed greater fidelity to conscience, or applied herself more assiduously to her duties. She threw herself into them with so much enthusiasm that her companions mistook this cheerfulness for insensibility, and one of them said to her, "but, Mademoiselle, it is no sacrifice to you." "Indeed, indeed, it is," Flore answered quickly, "but I accept it for God's sake. Would you have me do it otherwise than joyfully!"

As instances of her ready compliance with the spirit of the rule, we may mention the following:—

One day when she was looking for a book in the novices' library, she came upon a charming novel that had been placed there by mistake; she read it eagerly, then suddenly recollecting herself, "I am afraid I am giving food to my imagination; I ought to renounce this kind of reading"—and she laid down the book.

She had been allowed to keep a beautiful missal given her by her sister Aline, and to use it at Mass. After an instruction on detachment, she took it back to the novice-mistress. "Why do you deprive yourself of this book, my child?"

"Because I cling to it."

One word on the subject of obedience. The novices were talking together about the motives for practising this virtue. "It is my want of energy that makes me obey," said one, "the need of a lever to raise me." Another saw in it the matter of a vow to be taken. "And you?" asked the novice-mistress, turning to Flore: "Oh, as for me," she replied with emotion, "I obey God because I love Him."

She strove to infuse this generous spirit into those around her. A fellow-novice who had fallen into a state of despondency came to her. An order had been given which she could not bring herself to carry out. What should she do? "Submit," said Flore, "there is no other course open to you, it is the part of humility and courage." "Submit! To be made a laughing-stock! Never!" Flore answered, "Crush your will, heroic courage

like this is expected from a nun," and whether she would or no, she drew the refractory novice to the chapel, where the tempest soon became calm. She was thanked with effusion. "In future I shall always come to you." "No, in future you will obey for His sake," and Flore showed her triumphantly the Crucifix she wore. "It must be owned," she continued laughing, "that we have a wonderful gift for refusing obedience. Our superiors have plenty of reasons for making us plant cabbages with the root upwards."

As the end of the novitiate drew near, Flore redoubled her ardour for the amendment of her life, and turned her zeal towards her dominant fault. "I have noticed that self-love has great power over me," she wrote, "I do not know if it is my dominant fault, but I will fight against it as if it were."

It will be remembered that before she entered the Convent, she had doubted, in her humility, whether she were really called to be a nun. A few months before taking her vows, this feeling of her unworthiness returned, but this time without any distress of mind. "It is Thou who hast chosen me, O my God," she writes, "therefore I am not discouraged by my help-

lessness and weakness. I see that the Lord is pleased to use weak instruments. Those whom He chose to work for the salvation of the world, and whom He has set as princes over the earth, were themselves unlearned and ignorant men." The summary of her meditations, written day by day with her own hand during her Retreat before she took her vows, has been preserved. "Consider, O my soul," she writes, "the union thou art about to form with God, the vows which will bind thee so closely to Him, the name of Bride He gives thee. Oh! what a happy lot is thine! Confiding in divine grace, and no longer deceived by things of earth, give thyself wholly and without reserve to Him who has deigned to call thee. . . . Henceforth no more earthly ties, nothing to hold thee back in thine upward flight to God. Let Him be the only being to occupy thy thoughts, to command thee, guide, protect, and defend thee, to raise thee and to assuage thy thirst." She was professed at Mouscron on the Feast of St Joseph (19th March), 1834, the venerable Founder of the Institute officiating on the occasion.

To persons living in the world, the ceremony of Clothing is usually more impressive than

that of Profession ; the latter is, however, the most solemn and decisive moment in the life of a nun.

The priest turns to the novice, holding the consecrated Host in his hand, the organ and chant cease, and deep silence reigns, while she pronounces her vows :

“ My God, my Creator, my Redeemer, although I am nothing but weakness, and have offended Thee by my sins, yet relying on Thine infinite mercy, I venture to appear in Thine august presence and before Thy holy Altar. Before Mary and her blessed Spouse, I, M——, vow and promise to Thy divine Majesty for my whole life, poverty, obedience, chastity, according to the Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, which I accept and embrace in every point.”

How often in after years did the recollection of this day return to comfort Madame Flore ! How often did she press the ring and cross of her profession to her lips ! it was her favourite act of piety, and the consolation of her last hours.

The ceremony of pronouncing the vows is followed by the kiss of peace, a symbol of the union between the newly professed nun and

the religious family into which she enters. The young Sister kneels before the Altar, and after a short prayer rises, and, beginning with the eldest, gives to each nun the kiss of peace. Madame Delhayé could not restrain her tears when she saw her two daughters thus meet and embrace one another as Sisters in religion.

We have said nothing of the other ceremonies ; the lighted candle given to the newly professed nun, while the choir chant the Psalm, "*Dominus illuminatio mea,*" the "*Benedic anima*" chanted while the assembled people approach the Altar rails ; the sprinkling with holy water of the ring and clothing of the nun ; the oath on the Gospels—it is the rite in its entirety which is so touching.



G. van de Putte, Alost.]

CONVENT OF THE LADIES OF MARY, ALOST.

[To face page 26.

III

AT ALOST (HEADMISTRESS)

AFTER a Sister is professed in this Institute two paths lie before her—that of teaching, and that of filling some office in the government of the various houses ; to Madame Flore the duty of teaching was assigned.

Canon Van Crombrugghe wished to add a boarding - school to the day - school already established at Alost, and she was charged with the undertaking. In her humility she wondered at the choice, but she had learned to look upon herself as an instrument in God's hand ; she accepted the task and arrived at Alost, in August 1834, being then not quite eighteen.

The new school soon attracted attention by its high moral tone. Madame Flore had not passed through the usual scholastic training, but she possessed by intuition what others

acquire by study; she was also most conscientious in preparing her lectures, first making herself familiar with the text of the manual, then referring to other authors bearing on the subject, and finally writing out a clear summary of the whole; some of the books containing her notes for these lessons are still preserved.

The children were very fond of their young mistress. As soon as the bell sounded for recreation, they flocked around her like a swarm of bees, disputing who should have her on their side at the games, for Madame Flore delighted to take part in them.

She observed that girls from fifteen to eighteen years of age usually lose their taste for physical exercise, and prefer to loiter about with a favourite school-fellow; she therefore tried to fill the recreation time with so many and such varied amusements that no room should be left for idle conversation.

Education had been the dream of her life, and with a few strokes of the pen she has drawn the portrait of a perfect teacher: "Joseph and Mary shall be my guides. I will exercise authority over my pupils, as they did over the Child Jesus. I will win them by

my prayers, my patience, my ceaseless and untiring devotion. When I punish them, I will remember that I deserve reproof more than they, yet I will not fail to correct them, and will do it without softness, for in spite of my unworthiness, my office requires it of me."

Twenty years later she wrote as follows: "Whence comes our authority? From God. Only on this account is it justifiable, honourable, and amiable. Even children feel this. Try to rule them apart from this sovereign delegation; take your stand upon your own merit, your own prestige, the right conferred on you by their parents, you will see how far you are from being acceptable."

She refers to the dignity of the teacher's office: "To see ourselves enrolled in the ranks of those who labour for the salvation of souls; to be the helpers of the priests, the agents of the Church, the representatives of parents."

Madame Flore brought uniformity into the school customs; arranged the order of studies and the examinations at the end of each term, composed the prayers to be recited by the pupils before the different employments of

the day—prayers which have remained in use unchanged up to the present time. It is wonderful that she found time for so much when we bear in mind that she not only held the office of Headmistress, but also that of Assistant to the Superior. Her difficulties were increased by the fact that the Superior at Alost was also Mother Vicaress of the Institute, and thus obliged frequently to go from home, when the whole weight of responsibility fell on Madame Flore. “She rarely appeared among the community,” writes a contemporary Sister; “she rose at four, and went to bed at nine, except at times when there was an unusual pressure of work. ‘We did not become nuns,’ she used to say, ‘in order to lead a life of comfort; rest will come above, let us put off our enjoyment until then.’”

At this time she seems to have suffered from depression of spirit. She laments, “No, I do not respond to the mission which God has entrusted to me; I do not render the services that religion requires, either to my pupils or to my Sisters.” She called herself “the useless talent, the barren fig-tree, the parched ground that drank in the waters of Heaven and produced nothing.” She re-

approached herself (groundlessly as it seemed to those who knew her) with being irritable, with assuming a tone of command not sufficiently tempered by kindness. Happily Canon Van Crombrugghe was there to draw her out of her despondency. He writes: "I have only one fault to find with this poor Madame Flore against whom you show such righteous indignation! It is that she distrusts the kindness, the tenderness of her Divine Lord. O my child! It wounds Christ to distrust Him, beware of cherishing this feeling; it is an injustice to Him. Humility — there is nothing better; but not discouragement. According to your own expression, you are irascible like everybody else, but everybody is not irascible, so your naughty pen is guilty of a calumny. See how I defend this poor child against the false insinuations of her accuser! None the less do I pray that gentleness may ever remain in this soul that God is purifying by winnowing, and that He desires should belong to Him in the fulness of confidence and freedom."

Many of the Canon's letters are evidently written with a fatherly desire to enlarge and calm her troubled mind. Sometimes Madame

Flore herself writes in a playful vein : " I have read in a Commentary on the Gospels that one ought not to pray for a miracle unless it be necessary. It follows from this that in case of necessity it is permitted to pray for one. Judge, very Reverend Father, if this necessity exist for me. You know all my talents : they are so extensive that they are bounded on one side by ignorance, on another by inexperience, on a third by timidity. Consider whether under these circumstances it be possible for me, without a miracle, to instruct the eagles coming from the class of the learned Mother Olympiade. I tremble greatly ; and if I have sometimes prayed that God would send me pupils, I am very nearly praying that He will not send me these."

Again, as she drew near the age when the law of fasting would be binding upon her, she writes : " Lent is approaching, and my twenty-first year will soon expire. As you told me to write to you a little before that time, I will tell you exactly the state of my physical strength—(1) I am very well ; (2) I am always well, in proof of which I fast with all the ease in the world, having no headache, or any other ache, certainly none in my teeth ; it seems

to me, on the contrary, that these last are sharpened. Could any one be stronger at my age? I repeat, my health runs no risk. I can give my lectures and speak for a long time without fatigue, I feel neither ill nor faint. It seems as though I had been plunged into the Styx—and my heel too. Thus I have every reason to fear I may live to be ninety, and my ambition does not extend so far. I will not ask permission to fast, still less ask to be dispensed. I do not wish to be importunate. I have recently been warned against this by my Rev. Mother, and the remonstrance is fresh in my mind. I need such warnings to reconcile forever the self-will and submission which are so often at war within me. It is strange, Rev. Father, I seem always on the point of performing miracles of sanctity ; but I never get any further ; the first miracle has yet to appear.”

The Canon did not yield to these entreaties, for the law of fasting is almost incompatible with the labour and fatigue of teaching. Madame Flore therefore substituted other practices : “Not being allowed to keep the fast of Lent, I will try to substitute the following—(1) I will submit my judgment to that of my Sisters, acquiescing in what

they suggest, or only opposing it gently. (2) I will not refuse any dish offered to me, but will help myself to the least inviting morsels. (3) I will not lean back, nor rest on my elbows. (4) I will not warm myself at the fire, however much I feel inclined to do so. (5) If I obtain permission, I will say my rosary every day with my arms extended in the form of a cross." That which sustained her under these acts of voluntary expiation was the love of God ; love which shows itself in works ; for to her it was no passing feeling ; to love God was to die to self ; it was self-renunciation, self-forgetfulness, it was patience under daily trials. Nevertheless, there were moments when she felt lifted above herself by the power of the Divine Spirit.

Thus she writes, on one of her days of Retreat, in the form of a mystic dialogue :

"Now you have worked for a long time in My vineyard, come and rest awhile, for I fear lest you become tired and distracted ; I fear it may do you harm to be too long away from Me."

"O Master," she answers, "how kind Thou art ! Thou desirest that I should lay everything aside, that I should close mine eyes and ears,

and alone with Thee and my conscience should let the world fly from me ; that I should raise my thoughts on high, and see how my heavenly affairs stand. Is there any miscalculation there ? Are they improving or falling back ? ”

She lays bare the weaknesses of her soul. “ What I reproach myself with, O my dear Master, is littleness, cowardice of heart ; the least obstacle frightens me, the least contradiction makes me dejected. The saints became greater under trials, I become less. ”

The Canon encouraged her in the desire of perfection.

“ Follow the movements of the Holy Spirit, my child. Do not quench the flame He enkindles within you, but rather make it burn more brightly. God did not draw you so early from the world, and plant you in the calm Eden of your Convent, that you might be half a saint. St Bernard tells us that nuns are vowed, not merely to holiness, but to the perfection of holiness. It is not for them, therefore, to lag behind in the observance of commands given to all. Your aim should be continually to advance—by effort, by work, by desire, by sacrifice, by entire forgetfulness of self. ” He adds : “ With what pleasure I read

these lines—‘I desire to love Jesus in all, through all, and above all. . . . I do not desire consolations or rewards, but God alone, His goodness, His greatness, His kindness. How is it possible to know Jesus Christ, to be His alone, to be His bride, and not to love Him, not to be filled with His spirit.’ He Who inspired you to form these resolutions will give you strength to carry them out. Yes, love Him Who is infinitely worthy of love, love Him without measure, and this love will fill you with courage. It will make the struggle easy, the cross attractive, and it will enable you to accept the hardest sacrifices nobly and readily, if God permit that such should come into your religious life.”

The Canon had long wished to establish a day-school at Brussels, and, in February 1837, Mother Olympiade went there, accompanied by Madame Flore, and a lady named Mademoiselle de Brandt. In those days it was necessary to break the journey, and they passed the night at Malines, where, on the following morning, they heard Mass at the Church of Notre Dame d’Hanswyck. At the close of the Mass, Mademoiselle de Brandt suddenly exclaimed: “It is God’s will that

you should be here!" The Sisters looked at her in surprise, and she repeated in a tone of conviction: "You will found a Convent at Malines." This strange prophecy was soon confirmed by the voice of authority. The first word of the Archbishop, when receiving the Sisters, was the same declaration: "It is the will of God that you should come to Malines." Madame Flore writes: "May God preserve us from any hasty assumption of divine interposition; nevertheless we were strongly convinced that God had manifested His will in the matter."

The foundation at Brussels first claimed their attention. Madame Flore thus describes the future Convent. "It is a singular looking building in the Rue Finquette, 8 mètres of façade and 50 of depth. The entrance, a fine carriage entrance, leads to a courtyard, bounded on the one side by houses, on the other, by a suite of rooms opening one into the other—thus we have drawing-room, classroom, refectory, kitchen, opening into one another quite simply, like the squares of a draught-board. As for the garden, it is so narrow that we cannot walk in it without jostling one another in a sisterly manner."

Later she writes: "What do you think of our Sisters' success at Brussels, eighty pupils since the second term. May God be praised!" The Foundation was in fact destined to grow, and many of the nuns' present pupils at Brussels are the great-grandchildren of those taught in the Rue Finquette.

Since the mysterious words of Mademoiselle de Brandt, Madame Flore had never ceased to pray, and to ask for prayers for "an intention for the glory of God," as she called it. Her desire was fulfilled, and, on Christmas Eve of the same year, four Sisters were installed in their new Convent at Malines—a small house beautifully situated, and one that could easily be enlarged.

"Our travellers have now reached their destination," writes Madame Flore. "His Eminence gave them a truly fatherly greeting: 'Ah! the good Ladies of Mary! how I welcome them to my diocese!' and he said over and over again that God would be with them, and help them, as He had called them. . . . Just now they are furnishing their house. Sister Nathalie unites many occupations; she is carpenter, mason, gardener; the others under her orders varnish the desks, paint the pictures, etc.

Madame de Mallet (the Comtesse de Mallet) shows them the most kind and delicate attentions ; she insists on their being well fed and well lodged, and will not allow them to do penance, as they would like."

Madame Flore assisted them herself, as far as the subordinate office she held would permit ; she sent an old-fashioned desk and some seats that had lain in the lumber-room at Alost from time immemorial ; she "had nothing better to give, so would at least send these." From time to time she sent them other gifts in kind, such as fruit and sweets saved from a holiday feast. "You will have heard from Mother-General," writes the young Superior to her, "how welcome were your gifts. What mutual charity there is among us ! I think it is a consolation that God bestows upon us, in compensation for the many little troubles inseparable from a new foundation."

This house in the Rue St Jean was destined to become the Mother-house of the Institute, and so remained until 1850. Madame Flore seems to have had a presentiment of this high dignity, for she writes : "My thoughts often carry me away to you, dear Mother. I feel inclined to knock at the door of the future,

and ask what fate is reserved for your house. I see it successful, flourishing, shedding rays of brightness upon us. You know my imagination is vivid, and faith is soon obliged to take this incorrigible rebel by the shoulders, and throw it into the arms of Providence, with a *fiat* in anticipation, for everything."

The Sisters had been obliged to take as their chapel an old building that had served as a stable to the former owners. "To shelter Our Lord under such a roof!" writes Madame Flore. ". . . What would the proud lords of the Middle Ages have said, when they went there to admire the beautiful horses, and to choose one for the tournament, could they have known the high destiny reserved for this place! The armorial shields, too, of the Counts of Berthoud which still adorn the capitals of your columns!—there is room here also for reflection on the instability of earthly things." The day-school was opened in January 1838, and the boarding-school in the following May.

Whilst Madame Flore was at Alost, Canon Van Crombrughe constantly referred matters to her: "Consult Sister Flore." "Find out what Sister Flore thinks." So many marks of favour embarrassed her: "Why? Who

am I? I only make confusion when I meddle with things. You do not know me, Rev. Father. Sometimes the desire of certain virtues makes me speak as though I had them. If I were only to live a fortnight under your eye, I should seem quite different--bad and proud. Would your affection for me remain, or should I have lost it by the discovery of the evil that is in me?"

About this time the community received a visit from the Bishop of Ghent.

"Who do you think congratulated me on the anniversary of my Baptism?" writes Madame Flore, "His Most Reverend Excellency Mgr. Van de Velde, Bishop of Ghent, Domestic Prelate to his Holiness, etc. Do not cry out upon me, it is no fiction. He had learned incidentally that the Sisters were keeping the Feast of my Baptism, and whilst we were all gathered round him, he gave us a beautiful sermon on Baptism. He also said he should like to see several of our Convents in his diocese, and promised to help us if we decided to found them. He bade us 'live under the eyes of Jesus Christ by recollection, in His hands by resignation, and at His feet by humility.' . . ." As the Bishop passed through the school-room,

he noticed the name of the founder of the Institute. "Ah! M. Van Crombrugghe! He is a saint!"—then after a pause he added, "I should indeed be happy if he could attend my deathbed." "It is possible, my lord, replied Madame Flore, "that you may render this pious service to him." "No, he will survive me," he paused, and then went on, "he will survive me by twenty-seven years." This presentiment came true. Mgr. Van de Velde died in the following year 1838, twenty-seven years before the Canon.

In 1837 Madame Delhaye died, and, as many of the rules had not at that time acquired the force of law, the Canon gave permission for her daughters Flore and Bathilde to be with her during her last illness.

"I found my poor invalid," Madame Flore writes, "as helpless as a child, extremely thin and weak. I felt heartbroken at the sight, my tears choked me, and I was obliged to go away to let them flow. I had the consolation of watching by her for one night; her great Christian spirit never failed for a moment, and yet she suffered so much. Ah! Rev. Father, how sad it is to be unable to alleviate the

sufferings of those we love, and how greatly we need faith to sustain us at such a moment. God knows how dearly I loved my holy and tender mother. . . .”

This return to the world produced a painful impression on Madame Flore: “I was as it were beside myself with indignation, overwhelmed with grief, at all I saw and heard. Ah! Rev. Father, I always accounted myself happy in my solitude with my Divine Bridegroom, but how much more do I value my happiness now! What passions surge in the world! what selfishness! what indifference to religion! Ah! my Jesus, Thou hast made me feel more than ever how much I ought to love Thee in return for the inestimable favour of my holy vocation!”

Her meditations this year breathe greater strength and courage.

On the subject of obedience she imagines Our Lord saying: “What, Flore! You fly from obedience! You argue about the orders given you! You do not glory in your voluntary servitude! Ah! you do not know the merit of this royal virtue. You do not know what I designed to teach you by My life of subjection! See, I lived on earth twenty, thirty years, and

I lived in subjection! I to Whose laws the whole universe submits."

Then in a simple joyous strain she continues: "I hear and see God everywhere, even in the bell. It rings. What is that? The signal to rise. Yes, my God, I am at your service. It rings again. What is that? Go to the chapel. I go, Lord, I hasten. A third signal is heard. Make your meditation. O my Divine Master, do you give me this joy? Do you call me to your audience? Quick, my consecrated garments, my royal diadem!¹ I will present myself attired as a princess at the King's Court!"

In the same year that Madame Delhaye died, Bathilde came to Alost; her health was failing, and the doctor advised change of air. From this time the two sisters always passed the mid-day hour of recreation together; Bathilde lingered till July 1839, when she received the last sacraments, renewed her vows, according to the custom of the Institute, and a few days afterwards peacefully passed away.

"Illness had altered my pious sister very little," Madame Flore writes to the Canon, "I wish you could have seen the angel look on her

¹ An allusion to the Ave Maria, embroidered on the veil.

face. Her features were so calm as to make us doubt if she had suffered. I could have wished to remain for hours beside her dear form. Her example is a powerful incentive to me, a call to greater perfection, to self-renunciation, to love of God, to patience and resignation, all virtues of which my dear sister Bathilde was a model."

At this time Madame Flore writes in her notes of Retreat :—

"I am led to understand a change of Convent is under consideration for me. I will hold myself in readiness for every event ; if my superiors think well to send me elsewhere, *fiat* ; I will await God's orders without fear or grief." When she learned the certainty of her departure : "It is the will of God that calls me to Mouscron. However difficult my new position may appear, I ought to accept it with joy, with entire confidence in the goodness of God." Still, in taking leave of her Sisters she was all in tears. "Forgive me," she said several times, "I am very cowardly." She left Alost in September 1839, having been there five years. Madame Olympiade, who accompanied her, relates that she passed the time of the short journey in prayer. On arriving at the

Convent at Mouscron, she closed the door quickly behind her, saying : “ And now my God, everything for Thee ! ” “ How, my child, have you not always worked for God ? ” “ Oh yes, I hope so . . . but my sphere of action is not the same. At Mouscron, God wills that I should belong to Him entirely.”



Reproduced from a Nels postcard, Brussels.]

CONVENT OF THE LADIES OF MARY AT MOUSCRON—THE PARK.

[To face page 46.]

IV

AT MOUSCRON (PRIORESS)

As Madame Flore had foreseen, there were many difficulties to be met with at Mouscron.

The school had originally been a secular institution, but in 1822 the founders, wishing to give perpetuity to their work, asked to be affiliated to the "Ladies of Mary";¹ their request was granted, and in the following year they voluntarily transferred their house and grounds, and themselves took the vows. Partly from motives of gratitude, they were left for a time in charge of the school; but it is easier to adopt the habit than the spirit of an order, and these ladies, who were no longer young, did not always grasp the full meaning of the rule. To remedy this evil, Canon Van Crombrughe sought to leaven the community with zealous nuns, accustomed to a life of obedience, and he cast his eyes on Madame

¹ Then known as *The Daughters of Mary and Joseph*.

Flore. No one could have been better fitted for the task ; the nuns had pleasant recollections of the time she had spent with them as a novice ; and her tact could be relied upon in the delicate work of remodelling the school.

Many singular customs prevailed ; for instance, each pupil had her separate supply of provisions stored in the Convent cellar.

Faithful to the Canon's instructions, Madame Flore did nothing hurriedly, and at first her part was limited to example and advice. Within her own province, however, she effected some reforms ; the pupils were no longer allowed to go out so frequently, nor were they admitted under various categories—boarders, half-boarders, quarter-boarders ; and a simple uniform took the place of the varied and showy costumes then in use.

One of the pupils relates : "We admired our Mistress General very much, and more than once my companions and I were caught kissing her veil, or the end of her scapular, as if some virtue came from it to make us good." Another writes : "I remember the advice Madame Flore used to give us as though it were yesterday. There was scarcely a girl in the school more vain than I was, and I took

an especial pleasure in arranging my hair: 'My dear child,' she said to me one day, 'do you know that heads so much adorned outside are often quite empty and hollow within. Do not be like the savages, who dance for joy before a feather to put on their head! Stay,' she continued, 'here is something I met with a few days ago, read it, and think about it—it will just suit you'; and she gave me some pretty verses bearing on the subject. She was fond of these indirect means of doing good. Once she slipped a little statuette of Our Lord (the Sacred Heart) into my hand, saying, 'This is to remind you of the Divine Master's lessons: Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart.' To show the point of this advice, I should add that I was neither meek nor humble, and had just given a proof of it. Thus, all the time she was with us, her one care was to awaken the Christian life within us, and in all our comings and goings, in our walks, when she came to us after our meals or our lessons, and at accidental meetings, she had always a word that went to our heart, that pierced us like an arrow, or flashed upon us like a ray of light."

Madame Flore herself writes: "Join with

me, Rev. Father, in thanking God for His blessings to our children; they all improve in diligence, order, and love of duty. They humble themselves for their faults with a charming frankness. . . . I admire the effect of religion on these young souls. How sad it is to think that so many children are deprived of its precious influence!"

Again, after the children's first Retreat: "The behaviour of our pupils has greatly edified me; they kept silence as if they had been nuns, and now that they have returned to their lessons, they are walking fervently in the path of virtue. They are all favoured children of God, who will one day help us to Paradise, and be our crown there."

About this time Madame Flore's superiors conferred—or rather inflicted—the office of Prioress upon her; the calmness with which she accepted the burden was no less admirable than the humility with which Madame Catherine laid it down, feeling it a pleasure to sacrifice herself for the good of the Institute.

The change, however, was not well received in the little town. "Since your last visit," Madame Flore writes to the Canon, "I have had to submit to the bickerings of Mr N——,

who, it seems, was hurt at not being told of your plans with regard to me. I am also out of favour with the S—— family ; thus I have the advantage of beginning with the cross. I am resolved to be silent, to let them say and think what they will, and to act calmly according to my conscience, with a fair share of good humour. Time will allay the bitterness, and I hope to give sufficient pledge of my good intentions to win their confidence. The essential point is that the community should be content. Thank God, it is! All my Sisters have given me the best reception. The only thing that frightens me is that I feel myself so imperfect.”

To another she said : “ It is a fire of straw, not worth an ounce of regret ; it will all be forgotten to-morrow.”

Little by little the prejudices vanished, giving place to such flattering kindness that she had to guard against a new temptation : “ I have myself proved, Rev. Father, the excellence of your advice—to do my duty, and go forward. Behold me the object of most unexpected deference. The Rev. M—— preached my panegyric from the pulpit. I ‘ am a superior woman,’ ‘ an angel of good

counsel,' 'a Providence to the poor of Mouscron.' Oh! oh! and many another waft of incense! But why am I telling you this? That I may tell you everything, praise or blame; is it not all one in the mouth of people in the world!"

An apparently insignificant circumstance had brought about the change. There was a guild of working girls, important as regards numbers, but wanting in leadership, and taking little interest in their meetings. Madame Flore took charge of it, and soon the girls began to praise their new President to every one who would listen to them—she was a wonderful lady; you should come and hear her give religious instruction like *Monsieur le Curé*. Every meeting brought fresh recruits: "Come and see the new Prioress," and whether they would or no, the indifferent were brought, and taken in the snare, and these persuaded others in their turn. *M. de Maistre* says: "We must amuse the young lest they amuse themselves." Following this advice, Madame Flore frequently contrived some ingenious surprise for the girls: "It is a means of attracting these merry young people; thus we deck out the solid truth

that lies beneath, and we hope to do them some good."

Many of the girls were won back to the practice of their religion; while some, who were the children of negligent Catholics, received their first impressions of the faith from these Sunday gatherings.

Before long the clergy were able to congratulate themselves that a generation of Christian women, true mothers, devoted to work and duty, was ensured for the future; and this was only the first harvest, for sixty years later the work was still growing.

Madame Flore received touching presents from these girls on her Feast-day—garden produce, even a piece of ham, a litre of oil; occasionally some early vegetable was hidden away, stored up against that day, and woe to any greedy fingers that might discover it. She in her turn gave them objects of piety, and clothing, accompanied by such touching words that the girls were often moved to tears. When any of them married, they brought their babies to Madame Flore, and it was a real delight to her to bless these newly baptised infants, to dedicate them to Our Lady, and fasten her medal around their neck; she did

it with as much reverence as if they had been the children of a king, as indeed to the eye of faith they were.

Her influence quickly spread, her recommendation was valued as a means of obtaining employment, and, in after years, when she had left Mouscron, her name acquired an almost legendary character, and there was scarcely a family that had not a child named after her.

The means of the Convent at this time were very small, owing to several long illnesses and the expense of building the chapel. In vain the community denied themselves everything that was not absolutely necessary, the need of money was still severely felt, and often, as accounts became due, Madame Flore lay awake thinking how she could meet them. Sometimes it seemed to her that St Joseph came expressly to her aid, either through the Founder of the Institute, or in some other way. Once, on the very day that forty francs were needed to pay a bill, the sum arrived by post. "It was there," writes Madame Flore, "in a letter from a lady whom I did not know, and had never seen, but who wished to make this offering to a Convent—a kind attention that

could come only from St Joseph ; more than ever now will I leave to him the management of my barque, or rather of my cash-box."

She resorted to many expedients to keep the expenses within the income. One incident deserves to be related : "Our Mother needed a table-cloth for her private room, to hide the extreme shabbiness of the table. The upholsterer brought some to choose from ; he offered her one for twelve francs. 'Too dear.' One for ten francs. 'Too dear.' One for five, 'still too dear.' The poor man was in despair ; feverishly thrusting his hand into the depths of his box he drew out one completely out of fashion as regards colour and design, while our Mother kept saying : 'I want quite a common one ; it is for a poor woman to whom I wish to do this charity.' 'But for whom is it then ?' asked the Econome,¹ who was present. 'Cannot you guess ? It is for my table' ; and, as long as she remained Prioress, she took pleasure in this cheap table-cloth."

Sometimes the meals would be simpler than usual ; an inexpensive dish would reappear for

¹ The Ladies of Mary in England still give the name of Econome (or Economist) to the Sister whose duties correspond to those of the Procurator of a Monastery.

successive days until the required economy was effected; one year, figs were so plentiful that they could be had for almost nothing, and that year, figs appeared at collation every day during Lent, and those that were cast aside as too small, were used for cooking. Sometimes a habit that had been laid aside was mended, and taken again into use for an indefinite time; several old garments were made into one, and a keen observer might have seen two or three numbers on the same habit. "Our veils and scapulars were so much worn," one of the Sisters writes, "that we had to change them quickly before going to the guest-room; they were mended with faded pieces, and presented quite a scale of tints." Far from being ashamed of this poverty, Madame Flore gloried in it. "Is not poverty a heavenly ornament!" she exclaimed, "all the saints were poor, and wished to be so. Jesus himself lived on earth in poverty." One of her daughters could not bring herself to wear an old cloak. "Have you forgotten, my child," writes Madame Flore, "that our profession obliges us to have a great love of poverty? It is to practise it that we have renounced our individual

possessions, and lead a life in common, and that everything for our own use is so simple."

The poor, too, how she loved them! how she strove as far as possible to soften the hardships of their lot! To receive them with respect, and treat them with consideration was a habit she had acquired in childhood. A mysterious incident occurred on the day of her installation as Prioress. She had accompanied a lady to the door, when she found a beggar paralysed in both legs, supporting himself on crutches. "Poor old man," she exclaimed compassionately, and gave him a large alms. "God will return it to you," he murmured, then his manner changed, and, fixing his eyes on her, he asked her name. No one knew who the man was—he did not belong to the village, and the nuns never saw him again—but exactly a month afterwards, on the very day and hour, Madame Flore received fifty francs, addressed: "To Madame Flore, Prioress of the Convent, interest on her charity."

During the first years, the want of means debarred the Prioress to a great extent from the pleasure of alms-giving, but as soon as

the financial difficulties were over, she set aside every year a sum for charity. "It is an investment we should be unwise to neglect," she exclaimed gaily.

Her care was not limited to the bodily wants of the poor. The father of one of the girls—a locksmith—had refused to make his Easter Communion, not from impiety, but from human respect. Madame Flore sent for him, and talked with him; he went away in tears: "Ah! these artful little nuns," he said, "they turn you as they would turn a glove; I come a good-for-nothing, I return a strict Catholic." He made his Confession and Communion the next day, afterwards saying to his companions, that but for that witch of a woman, he, who had unlocked so many doors on earth, would have found the door of heaven shut against him.

A fine young workman, who had married one of the girls, lost his wife at the birth of their first child. Almost beside himself with grief, he plunged into dissipation, and refused to listen to the priests who tried to lead him aright. Madame Flore realised that such a man could only be reached by an appeal to his feelings. She paid for a nurse

for the baby, then, as Christmas drew near, she dressed it in a frock which one of her old pupils had made, put a 5-franc piece in its hand, and sent for the father. When the poor man felt the arms of his little child around his neck, and heard the sweet tones of its baby voice, he was melted into tears: "Upon my word you are a good woman!" he said, "ask anything you like, and I will do it for you." "My good friend, I only ask one thing. God has taken care of your child. Do you take care of your soul." "I understand, I understand, you are right. We will have it washed and clothed in white like this little one; it shall not be said that this bonny boy has only a vagabond for a father."

When trade was bad and the mills closed, Madame Flore could not go to the door lest her compassion should carry her too far. "How can one dine, when the poor are starving; I cannot eat when I think of them."

The following words are taken from her address to the Sisters on the day when prizes were given to the children of the poor school:—

"My dear Sisters, let us devote ourselves to the poor. The rich are not in need of

anything; all the refinements and pleasures of life are theirs. But where is the well-being of the poor? Who is there, but ourselves, to watch over the frail and interesting little ones who fill our schools? Often they have not even a mother's care, for the mother works at the factory. Let us supply her place as well as we can. Has not Jesus Christ exalted poverty? He chose a holy but poor woman for a mother, a poor carpenter for a father, a poor stable for a palace! What great lessons, what divine and persuasive examples!"

One of her chief cares was to provide clothing for the children. "I still seem to see," one of the nuns relates, "the cupboard in the corner of her room, where she stored cast-off clothing, and remnants sent from the shops. During nine months of the year this cupboard was gradually filled, and during the three months before the approach of winter, it was emptied, and rags and tatters were transformed into garments of every size and shape, which, in spite of the medley of colours, served to protect the children from the cold."

Madame Flore was punctuality itself. Every week at a fixed hour she went through the

details of housekeeping with the Sister in charge. She herself watched over the whole Convent, and often when least expected, her shadow would flit across some court or corridor, so that everyone was kept on the alert. Once, on her Feast-day, as she was sitting down to dinner, she was told that the morning housework was not finished; without a moment's hesitation she left the table, accompanied by some of the Sisters, made the beds, and returned smiling. On another Feast-day she was missing when all were assembled for the evening entertainment. Messengers were sent in all directions in vain; she was helping the Sister-cook, who would otherwise have been unable to be present.

Incidents of this kind occur throughout her life; even when she was Mother-General she would be found preparing the vegetables, working the sewing-machine, or damping the linen for ironing. "St Catherine made soup very well," she used to say, "and found great merit in it; I can quite believe it, if it were only by scalding her hands so much."

Some figures taken from a memorandum book of 1848 will give an idea of the extent of the work at Mouscron; there were at that

time, 60 boarders, 200 day-scholars, and 300 children in the poor schools.

Madame Flore rarely interfered in the affairs of the school, but left entire freedom to the mistresses in the exercise of their duties.

She only gave the addresses on Sundays after Mass. "To deprive us of our Sunday gatherings," writes an old pupil, "was the punishment we most dreaded; that Sunday had lost half its charm. Madame Flore made it her especial aim to train the conscience, and, speaking for myself, this was the greatest service she ever did me, and one for which I shall never cease to thank her. She did not, like some less experienced teacher, tell us at once, 'that is wrong,' she led us on to judge and condemn ourselves; and the tears would come to our eyes, and the most frank avowal to our lips—an avowal that could never have been drawn from us in any other way. To take an instance. On one occasion I had received from my mistress a rebuke that had exasperated me. Finding a pretext for leaving the class, I precipitated myself like a bomb into Madame Flore's room, and began to explain with the flow of language that excitement gives. The mistress 'was unjust to me,'

‘prejudiced against me,’ all the usual recriminations of pupils in the wrong in all times and places. Madame Flore did not let me finish. Taking from her work-table the *Imitation of Christ*, she read with impressive gravity, words which seemed expressly designed for me. ‘The passionate man easily believes evil, and changes good into evil.’ ‘You know so well how to give a good colour to what you do.’ ‘It would be much more just to accuse yourself, and excuse your brother.’

“And thus with regard to all the elder girls—apprentices in virtue, sometimes novices in germ—she never made a shadow of a concession to our pride ; she often pleaded extenuating circumstances, but it was in favour of the humble and penitent, not the naughty ones who turn away from every good impulse. As for me, I ended by following her advice, which was to keep entirely silent when I felt my anger rising. I found the plan a very good one ; while, on the other hand, I have only too often experienced that, if I permitted myself a single word in the heat of passion, I overflowed like a sea without dikes.”

Sometimes Madame Flore was severe ; if a bad example had been given ; if there had

been a relapse into a grave fault, or obstinate persistence in bad conduct, then she publicly questioned the intractable child, and exacted a full reparation.

One day, in a moment of anger with her mistress, a pupil threatened to leave the school. Madame Flore sent for her: "Is it true, my child, that you wish to leave?" The child remained silent. "I should not blame your decision. Possibly there may be schools where the mind and heart can be trained by means that are always pleasant. Try in one of those."

To another she said: "Know once for all, my child, authority rests with your mistresses. To refuse to obey is to provoke your exclusion; think this over."

At other times she would remain silent; then, with a look of deep sadness, she would call the child to her with a gesture, and take her to the Oratory: "Ask Our Lord what He thinks of your conduct." It was seldom that repentance and amendment did not follow.

She desired that the rule should be grave, exempt from the indulgence of the age; nothing that could flatter the senses, or lead to vanity, found favour in her eyes; for example, the

pupils were forbidden to bring eatables to the Convent, and anything so brought was given to the poor ; the same discipline was observed with regard to dress, neither trinkets nor rings being tolerated. Once, when she was Mistress-General, she found a girl placing herself in affected attitudes before a mirror ; she motioned to her to follow her, and, standing gravely before her, with a sad look, she asked : “ My child, whom do you adore ? God ? . . . No, it is yourself that you adore : you worship your appearance, your hair, your dress. Be more noble-minded.”

It was one of her maxims, that from the age of sixteen or seventeen, a girl should to a great extent train herself ; “ not only should she submit, but she should do it of her own free will.” With regard to young children, she had few rules ; they should be told to do this, to go there, in a kind but firm tone ; so readily, however, were her principles understood, that one day a little child of five, struggling against a fit of obstinacy, ran to her mistress, saying : “ Madame, make me will to do it.” To make children *will* to do right, in other words to teach them self-control, is the aim of all education.

In her intercourse with the parents of her pupils, Madame Flore was firm in action and frank in expression.

A lady, who was annoyed at her refusal to allow her daughter to go out with her, rejoined: "But indeed I have a right to take my child out with me." "Certainly, Madame," was the answer, "but we also have a right to safeguard our rules of discipline." "What do you mean?" "That we shall not receive N—— back after this voluntary infringement of our rules." Hereupon, the lady flew into a passion, and launched forth in a torrent of invectives; when she had exhausted her vocabulary, Madame Flore calmly inquired: "Is there anything else you wish to say to me?" The lady looked at her in astonishment, shrugged her shoulders, and contented herself with saying, "These nuns! these nuns!" and there was no more question of taking the child out.

A somewhat similar incident occurred some years later at Coloma. A former pupil had become a Carmelite, and the father, an excitable gentleman, impetuous in action, bore Madame Flore a grudge on this account. "I will stand at your door as your pupils come

in," he exclaimed with vehemence, "and I will tell everyone what nuns do with our girls. How they make them fanatics, idiots; how they transform them into nonentities, or convent-birds." When he ceased, Madame Flore calmly answered, "You are perfectly right, Monsieur, if Convents are what you say, it would be an act of charity and public service to denounce them to the general indignation."

To take another instance. The Sister in charge of the laundry brought to Madame Flore a letter, which had been sent clandestinely to one of the girls; it contained the following passage: "Cheer up, dear N——, if your life is hard and devoid of pleasure now, in six months' time, farewell to the cage and the rules! You will cast off the Convent strictness, and put on the robe of liberty." Madame Flore at once sent the letter to the girl's mother with an indignant comment: "I have no doubt, Madame, that it was without your knowledge that the enclosed letter was sent to your child. When you have read it, you will understand why I decided to write to you . . . it ought not to be necessary to remind you, Madame, that respect for authority and rule form the basis of education. This

letter tends to destroy both in the mind of your child. I do not speak of the offensive reference to ourselves; if I am concerned about it, it is only on account of its effect on N——."

The Ladies of Mary had expelled from their school a girl who was related to an influential member of the Town Council; this gentleman took offence, and threatened to establish a lay school. Madame Flore remained firm: "I informed Monsieur N——," she writes, "that I regretted to disoblige him, but that it was impossible for me to keep M——. Monsieur N—— has not, as we have, the moral responsibility for our two hundred children."

We must not omit to mention her influence over the Children of Mary, her "little legion of honour," as she called them. Young as they were, she inspired them with a true zeal for souls; she appointed them Zelators for duty, virtue, and discipline. Under this title, she charged them to win over one or other of their companions, to calm the anger of one, to urge on another who was careless or idle. After they left school they carried on the same work in the world, and it was this that united them so closely to her. Among the

girls who knew her, many loved her, all esteemed her, and few forgot her. The respect which she inspired was, more than once, the secret motive which led to a return to duty.

A former pupil, a German, after many fruitless entreaties, was at last able to pay a visit to the Convent. She wrote: "My heart's joy! A never-to-be-imagined feast! That dear house! Already in a dream I see all its inhabitants! . . . I shall find Madame Flore old, ugly, wrinkled like the flounce of a skirt, but her heart! Oh! I know it well! That will not be changed!" When she saw her enter the guest-room, her emotion overflowed, as did that of Madame Flore: "Ah! dear L——," neither could speak. She remained three days, pouring out her troubles to the Reverend Mother, and drawing from her advice and sympathy, the strength to lead a virtuous life amid difficult and dangerous surroundings.

Another time, towards the close of Madame Flore's life, an old pupil, who was very unhappy, was talking to one of the nuns—both were crying—Madame Flore had just passed; the visitor paused and looked after her for a long time, then turning to her companion, "Ah!

if I had only listened to her, she foretold it all,"—and she began to weep again.

The following letter was written by one, who as a child, was especially beloved by Madame Flore, because she was exposed to greater trials and sufferings than the others: "I could have wished, dear Mother, that my whole life had been spent under your guidance. Ah! God knows I never wanted to hasten the day when I should leave school. I never looked out of the window, saying to myself, 'Ah! when I shall be free! when I can do as I like!' Even now, I would that my tastes had never been changed since then. But, alas! I feel I am no longer fifteen. I have nothing left of my pious childhood, but the memory. I suffer violent conflicts, and have not always the strength to resist. Your last letter did me much good. I have prayed, and gathered new courage from your advice. See how you are always my guardian Angel! Often when I am divided between the voice of conscience and the allurements of pleasure, I recall your face, I think of your look of grief. Then the blush comes to my cheek, generosity rises in my heart, and I resist. It is your triumph and my deliverance."

Another lady wrote after the death of Madame Flore: "I have put her holy life beside mine, so empty of merit, so full of faults . . . and I have been moved to the depths of my soul. I have only one regret, that I did not give her, before her death, the consolation of seeing me return to the practice of the Christian life. At least in Heaven, she shall see this change. My faith has come back, my heart is at rest. . . ."

Madame Flore had not acquired her method of education by study. Many years before, she had written to the Canon: "I am reading Overberg, and find some useful things in it, and also a proof that God has given me some aptitude for training children. I often laugh, when reading to myself, to find the writer recommending the very methods that I arrived at by instinct, and have often put in practice, without knowing that they were approved."

In the early days of the Institute, the nuns acted to a great extent on the principle laid down by the Count de Maistre: "There is no easy way to learn difficult things; the surest is to shut oneself up at home and study." A letter written at that time to the Canon gives an idea of their breadth of culture. "Our

tastes turn to the great authors, Bossuet, Fenelon, Racine; not only do we feed our minds on this solid and strengthening food, but our hearts expand at the thought that we have received these books from you. Good gifts from our kind father. You do us good and give us pleasure at the same time; you refresh us amid the dryness of study."

The Canon was in the habit of visiting all the Convents he had founded once a year, and after his visit to Mouscron in 1845, he wrote to Madame Flore expressing his satisfaction.

Later, however, troubles arose. A reaction set in against the changes introduced. It seemed to the former Superior that her work was being undone: Why give up our old customs? Why all these innovations? Were vanity and the spirit of the world to invade the Institute? Soon a memorial was drawn up to be presented to the Bishop; it was the work of a morbid imagination, and no doubt, before God, the author was not accounted responsible. "I was very much distressed at all that happened," Madame Flore wrote later; "I saw only one way of bearing the cross, to turn to God with confidence, and keep myself closely united to Him." Two

courses were open to her : to endure in silence, or to act, as in civil affairs, and seek the dismissal of the official at fault. Madame Flore unhesitatingly chose the first : "After all, this is a cross which God sends me. I must bow my head and hold it with both hands, until it is over. This is how I feel to-day, but perhaps to-morrow I shall be cast down like a child, for it is often so with me, especially of late ; at times full of courage and of a zeal that surprises me, then again, susceptible, moved almost to despondency. Never until now, have I felt so great distaste for my duties."

Later on, her cheerfulness returns—"I feel better to-day than I have done lately. I have been in rather a gloomy mood, and this because I was wanting in gentleness and humility. Do you know, dear Rev. Father, that I am the one who most needs reproof, and that sometimes I overstep the bounds of meekness. You will learn, too, that I have only discovered this fault since my nomination."

At last the trial was over : "Blessed be God a thousand times for His mercies ! This soul led astray for the moment, has now not only made amends for her fault, but has set

us an example of penitence and given us edification. . . . As soon as she felt the first symptom of the inexorable disease which attacked her, our poor Sister saw in it the opportunity for expiating her past fault. She accepted it as such."

In 1848 the effects of the French Revolution were felt as far as the south of Flanders, and especially at Mouscron. A thousand French insurgents attempted to cross the Belgian frontier; they made "Risquons-Tout," a hamlet of Mouscron, the theatre of their operations, and, had they been successful, the Convent would have been exposed to pillage.

Madame Flore thus describes the situation:—

"MOUSCRON, *28th March* (1848).

"MY REV. FATHER,

"I hear the news is bruited about that Mouscron has been sacked. I hasten to tell you that things have not yet come to that point, and that an ample garrison watches over us. It bivouacs at the station; six pieces of artillery are directed against the frontier. I am assured by experienced people that the malcontents who are recruiting in

the Republic will never be so foolish as to come within range of our grape-shot. By way of precaution, we have sent to a place of safety everything that we could remove from the danger of pillage. The Burgomaster is full of kindness and forethought for us; he came himself to assure us we had nothing to fear. Other friends keep us hourly informed of the news."

On the 31st she writes again :—

"Our troops have put the insurgents to flight. Three wounded (two French and a Belgian) are in the hospital, and, as the Sisters who were nursing them are worn out with fatigue, two of our Sisters have taken their place. They are much edified by the patience and piety of one of the wounded. The poor boy is an only son; he had allowed himself to be drawn into it; he had not fired a shot, when a ball passed through his thigh; the surgeon tried for two hours to extract it, but without success. After all, he is a good Christian; he had made his Easter Communion, and his only grief was in thinking of that of his mother. . . . Many prisoners have been taken to-day and yesterday; Mouscron continues well guarded. The troops are numer-

ous and are picketed along the frontier ; in the event of an attack, they will know how to repulse it. I offered the Burgomaster the use of our day-school for the wounded ; he thanked me warmly, and accepted in case of need. Our mistresses and pupils remain quietly at work, and give no heed to the situation, except to pray. Do not be frightened by the letters of Madame N——. This dear Sister already sees our Convent pillaged, Mouscron in flames, and the nuns slain. Give me your blessing, before this slaughter by the new *sans-culottes* takes place.”

Nevertheless, the shouts, the call to arms, the firing at about half a league's distance from the Convent, the shaking of the ground by the distant explosions—all this left a painful impression on the young Superior.

When all was quiet again, a second attempt, more determined than the first, renewed the alarm.

“We are told to expect brigands to-day, 2nd April ; our troops await them, standing firmly, fully armed. This evening the country around us presents a singular appearance. In the twinkling of an eye our soldiers cut down trees, and made huts for themselves,

covered with straw, or anything that came to hand. Around this improvised camp, sentinels mount guard, with orders to shoot down every suspect. It is dreadful to think of the lives of our fellow-creatures being thus made away with. All the shops have been closed since five o'clock, and the streets are deserted, except for the patrols. Several of our pupils were sent for yesterday. I had thought of sending the others home, but was dissuaded from doing so."

Every post brought new details: "You know that Mouscron is continually on the *qui-vive*. Yesterday the bandits forced a position at Mont-à-Leu, and pillaged the surrounding farms, holding the inhabitants to ransom. Nothing stops them; there is no longer any restraint, no fear of God or of His justice; some people cannot reconcile these misdeeds with the means of defence at our command. Is there some treachery? Do not be uneasy about our fate, dear Rev. Father, we try to remain tranquil, commend ourselves to God, and await the issue of events."

Later she writes: "Give your blessing, Rev. Father, to my pupils and me. They

keep well. They hear so much of fighting that they have become quite warlike. Yesterday, I accidentally came upon them, marching along the garden walks with gold epaulets; they erected barricades, gave the word of command, marched boldly on the enemy, and put him to flight; the youngest had been enlisted as sentinels, and remained motionless at their post for quite a long time, through fear of being dismissed from the battalion."

One thing caused her anxiety: "Our finances are in a most pitiable state; besides having lost many pupils, the fees of those that remain are still unpaid, and it is the time for settling our accounts. The prospect disheartens me, and again I feel how weak I am; yet I pray God to give me counsel and strength. . . ."

At last peace was restored, but the difficulties of the community were not over. They could not afford to pay for work-people, and were obliged to do everything themselves; they washed, ironed, and the stronger among them got up at 3.30 to rake and weed the garden, while others repainted the doors and benches: "Following the example of the Holy Family," they said, "we earn our bread by the sweat of

our brow, in the evening we reckon up the wages due to us. How dreadful! Only nuns could be so carried away by the delight of making money!"

Madame Flore herself writes: "How I love to feel myself in the arms of Providence, living from day to day without care for the present, or anxiety for the future. I think God wishes to teach me that this is pleasing to Him, for He comes to my help in the most unexpected way. Yesterday I received the fees for two pupils, and to-day for a third. Our tradespeople, too, are most disinterested. All are content to receive payments on account, and one has just told Madame Clementine that he did not expect anything from us this year."

Not less admirable, though Madame Flore is careful to say nothing on this point, was her charity at this time. There is always great misery after an insurrection: trade is paralysed, the factories closed, and many workmen left without resources. An eye-witness writes: "You have no idea of Madame Flore's compassion for these poor people. By repeated efforts she succeeded in finding work for some of them, by writing to the managers of the

spinning factories ; she also received alms on their behalf, which she privately distributed." Her almoner was a working man, a slater, called in the village "Good Louis," or "Madame Flore's Louis." He had been seriously injured by a fall from the chapel roof, and lay in the hospital for three months, between life and death ; when he came out, he still needed rest and care, and Madame Flore daily sent him nourishing food. Louis took every opportunity of showing his gratitude, and during the recent disturbances, mounted guard at the Convent door, with a huge sword, which gave him almost a ferocious aspect. The service he most valued, however, was the spiritual help she had given him, and he, in turn, became the apostle to all the backsliders of the district, speaking openly to them of confession, the sacraments, everything they had been accustomed to ridicule. At each fresh recruit, he ran to the Convent, waving his cap : "One more in the net !"

Let us turn now to Madame Flore's record of her spiritual life : "When I reflect that I have passed half of my thirty-three years in religion, in the midst of a torrent of grace, I feel greatly humiliated to be still at the A B C

of virtue. . . . Now at last I must resolve to sanctify my life. The work is urgent. Henceforth no more self-love, no more vain reflections about myself—self!—self!—but what am I! Let us learn to forget ourselves. My thirty-third year is a warning from on high, and a signal for a better life.”

Again: “My hastiness, my impatience and asperity of temper continually get the mastery over me, and my Sisters suffer in consequence. Pray to God, Rev. Father, that He may grant me the energy necessary to correct faults so lamentable, and so harmful to my Sisters.”

In her notes of Retreat we read: “Gentleness, gentleness, and evermore gentleness! I believe this is what God asks of me.”

Was she really thus wanting in gentleness? The opinion of her Confessor, which she wrote down in her journal, seems to exonerate her: “The confidence and affection of your daughters proves that your heart is not so bad as you think. I say this, not to flatter your self-love, but for fear lest this imperfect knowledge of yourself should discourage you. Be gentle to yourself. The best way to be patient with your neighbour, is to be patient with yourself.”

V

AT COLOMA (MISTRESS-GENERAL OF THE INSTITUTE)

ON 8th December 1849, Madame Flôre was released from the office of Prioress at Mouscron, and appointed Mistress-General, a change which necessitated her removal to Coloma.

It is impossible to describe the grief of the community and pupils at Mouscron. "Is it true," one of the nuns writes to the Mother-General,¹ "that we shall see our kind Superioress no more. She asked us to pray for her, but may she too have compassion on us, her poor daughters. No doubt it was in preparation for this blow that we have been so often exhorted to detachment; I little thought how far I should have to carry it. . . . M. le Curé asked us yesterday: 'Is the Prioress not

¹ Madame Olympiade.



COLOMA (BELGIUM)—MOTHER-HOUSE OF THE LADIES OF MARY.

[To face page 82.

coming back? It is very unexpected news and a great loss, who has done it?' 'Our Mother-General.' 'And what do you say to it, my good daughters?' 'I . . . we try to be resigned.' 'You made no opposition?' 'We did not know it beforehand.' 'There is no appeal?' 'No appeal.' 'And no reprieve possible?' 'No reprieve possible.' 'Ah! my good daughters, my good daughters, I wish you courage and Paradise at the end of our troubles.'"

The change was a sacrifice to Madame Flore also. She writes to the pupils: "Your grief is the echo of mine, dear children; I was very happy among you. God has called me elsewhere. I have answered with a generous *fiat*, and I would urge you to do the same. God's will is always worthy of love, even when it requires what is painful. Nothing could prove your gratitude to me more than your good conduct. . . . Dear children, accustom yourselves to sacrifice. There is so much of it in life. It is not always foreseen. Who could have told me two months ago that obedience would place me at a distance from you, that I must leave my little communicants, whom I love with all my heart, my dear poor people, and all of you! So many unexpected crosses

which my removal brings with it, and which God gives me grace to bear for love of Him."

With others she playfully veiled her regret : "Come, dear children, be reasonable. If I were going to Lapland, or the interior of Africa, it would be another matter ; you might be afraid of my being frozen or roasted. But to Coloma ! . . . and travelling is so easy in these days."

Her farewell to the nuns took a graver tone : "So we are parted, my dear daughters, all in God ! all for God ! all for Jesus crucified ! We did not come into the world to live in comfort, and we did not embrace obedience for our own pleasure. Our fervent exercise, our constant practice, should be to die to ourselves. Hail Jesus ! Hail the Cross !"

Madame Flore had no sooner arrived at Coloma, than she met with opposition in the exercise of her duties. A difference of opinion arose between her and the Mother-General. Madame Flore held that, within their own province, the initiative should be left to those holding subordinate offices ; Madame Olympiade took the opposite view. To quote from Madame Flore's letter : "Although friendliness always reigns among us, Rev. Father, we differ in

opinion as to certain points of our rule which I have mentioned to you. This troubles me. How to love and esteem one another and work together while differing on matters of vital interest?" Again: "I do not think my services are much appreciated here, *fiat*. It costs me little, as you know, to be left in obscurity. . . ."

In her meditations she writes: "What harm can human suspicion and distrust do me? It is only ambition and pride that can be troubled by such things. If I had a little love for Our Lord, I should wish to be despised with Him. Courage, then, my soul! Let me be praised or blamed, judged with justice, or with prejudice—it is all for God."

Renunciation is often accompanied by spiritual joy. "Be reassured about me," she writes to the Canon, "I feel a deep peace and happiness. You are surprised, and ask whence comes this strange joy. Here is the explanation. I have told myself once for all that I ought to see God through everything that happens to me; that He has traced out my path, and measured my strength; that my part is to bend myself to the position appointed for me; and, after all, what are my childish trials

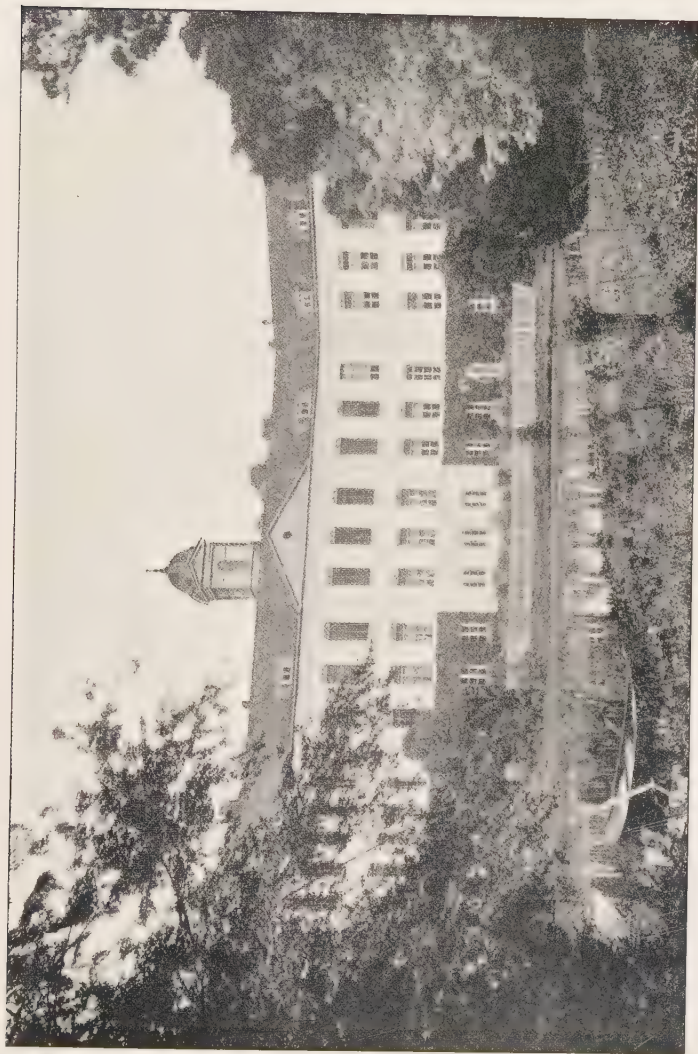
compared with those that others have to endure!

“Besides, how God softens these trials! Your fatherly affection, which has never failed me, which has followed me like a Providence ever since I entered religion, remains assured to me. I have the sweet confidence that I am in God’s grace—what more can I desire!”

Later she writes: “I feel more than I used to do—in spite of my coldness and indifference—that I am strongly attracted towards God. The thought that in Heaven there will be no more suffering, sadness, or want, moves me little, but I feel quite animated and transported when I say to myself, ‘In Heaven we shall love God much and unceasingly, much, and ever more and more.’”

These trials, which lasted for eight years, in no way embittered her character, as the following letter, written in 1856, will show:—

“We have begun our holidays well, Rev. Father, as steersmen, oarsmen, or passengers on the water. Thanks to the kindness of Mgr. de P., we have a pretty little boat, in which we delight to row about our lake, in the midst of flocks of ducks and tufts of water-lilies.”



COLOMA, WITH THE LAKE.

Again, on the Feast of the Holy Innocents:—

“To-day after dinner our little communicants visited the ‘Virgin of the Mountain.’ The day was beautiful. The sky with its deep blue, recalled the innocence of the young martyrs. I had read to my little band the touching hymn, in which the Church seems to pour forth all her poetry. You would not believe, Rev. Father, how eagerly they listen to these pathetic stories. They envied the lot of the young victims, sacrificed at the cradle of Jesus, thinking they had reached Heaven so swiftly and so surely. One of them was surprised that the Church should have given an octave to this Feast, but her companion answered quickly, that the ‘Good God had done it to console the poor mothers.’”

Children interested Madame Flore greatly, and she had the power of riveting their attention, so that they neither saw nor heard what was passing around them. No one could apply the Gospel teaching more ingeniously and vividly, or bring it more within the reach of their young minds by comparison and illustration.

The preparation of girls for their first

Communion was the task she loved best, and which she fulfilled for more than twenty years.

“To prepare children for their first Communion,” she writes, “is a delicate task. . . . Our principal aim should be to direct them to Jesus, to open their souls lovingly to the lessons and example of the Divine Master. If we attain this end, all is well. We have carried out the will of Holy Church. . . . Our communicants may indeed, like ourselves, be led astray by the things of this world, they may fall victims to the contagion of the age, and drift away; the grace of the Holy Eucharist will have penetrated too deeply into their souls to allow them to perish.”

We should mention here the part which Madame Flore took in founding the Association of the Blessed Sacrament. One day, when conversing with the Reverend Father Boone, she showed him a letter she had just received from a priest in the neighbourhood, describing the condition of his church.

“See, Father, what a lamentable picture!” said Madame Flore. “Could we expect such destitution in Catholic churches?”

“Man lives for pleasure, Madame. David

was ashamed to dwell in a palace while the Ark of God remained in a tent. Davids are rare in these days."

"It is for want of thought, Rev. Father; but you monks have the resource of preaching. Speak, urge others to speak. Recall the faith of our fathers, who gloried in their well-kept churches."

"I see. You are inviting me to a Eucharistic Crusade?"

"Why not? So many works of less interest are undertaken. The smallest coin is of use when the offering becomes general."

"And suppose I tell you that the project is already there," said the Father, touching his forehead.

"Is it really so, Rev. Father? Oh! how glad I am! The more so, as with you to resolve is to carry out."

Needless to say, the house at Coloma was among the first to take up the new work, and Madame Flore continued to direct it for more than twenty-eight years.

"How happy are you Associates!" she once exclaimed, "each one of you is in habitual, intimate, relationship with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Ah! suffer yourselves to be led

by Him. Worldly people do the reverse; they accept their rule of life from the spirit of the age."

A duty, which she especially impressed upon them, was submission to the teaching of the Church. "What does your Catechism say?" she asked, when one of them sought her opinion on a matter of faith. "Our Catechism is the torch of our life; all our dogmas are certified there and placed in a light that can be borne by our weak sight. . . . It is said of the Catholic Church that she is the school of reverence, let her be a school of reverence for you; and reverence implies submission, obedience. The Church has made laws, given commands—keep them; she ordains fasts—observe them; she forbids the reading of such and such books—do not read them; and make it your glory thus to be subject to the stern authority, the precious restraint of the Church."

Every year, in the month of June, which is dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament, she united the members into a sort of Association of good example and prayer, and sent them every day, in turn, to spend a quarter of an hour in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. To light a lamp, to make an act of

consecration and reparation, and to pray for the Church, was the task assigned to them. Further, on the first Friday of every month, the Associates met in her room to work for poor churches. After prayer, the work was distributed, and then followed the reading of some book, usually on Italian affairs.

Even as far back as 1847, Madame Flore had foreseen the trials that would fall upon Pius IX. "The Holy Father is now on his Tabor," she wrote; "let us pray that Tabor be not changed to Calvary, by one of those revulsions of opinion which are so much to be dreaded in these days." When her fears came true she wrote: "We are taking Heaven by storm; nuns, pupils, poor children, all are pouring forth prayers. What a terrible time!" She only breathed freely when she heard of the intervention of France. "God be praised! help comes!"

The girls knew so well how deeply Madame Flore sympathised with the Pope that, as one of them relates, they used to watch her face as she was looking for something to read to them, and say to one another: "Look, she is crying! . . . we shall have Pius IX.!" and "so we had, and she enlarged on her favourite,

though sad, theme so eloquently that we too were moved in our turn."

Let us here anticipate events and pass on to 1864. In that year, the President of the Association of the Blessed Sacrament at Coloma was Mademoiselle Bellini, the daughter of the Dutch consul at Rome. Her father, who had a great veneration for Pius IX. and had collected a considerable sum of Peter Pence in Holland, undertook to present to the Holy Father an address and offering from the Associates at Coloma; the thought of an answer never occurred to the girls.

A few days after the audience, however, Madame Flore came into the school-room radiant with triumph and joy. M. Bellini had attained the honour he so much desired; for ten minutes he had knelt before the Holy Father, had kissed his venerable hands, touched his white robe, spoken to him from his heart; he had not forgotten Coloma.

"Coloma, where is that? in what town?"

"At Malines, Holy Father."

"Ah! in the province of Anvers, the diocese of Mgr. Sterckx?"

"Exactly so, a good and holy bishop, who sometimes visits these girls . . . most Holy

Father, here is the offering they have charged me to present to your Holiness."

"Is it an alms?"

"Yes, most Holy Father, and not without merit; it is the outcome of sacrifice."

"How so?"

"The elder girls have denied themselves their New Year's gifts, the younger their St Nicholas and other childish pleasures, in order to provide it."

Pius IX. listened with a fatherly smile, and made repeated signs of approval. These were private details; the important part was the Pope's reply to the address:—

"He who holds on earth the place of the Divine Master feels great joy in receiving children who come to him; hence your letter and offering are so pleasing to the Holy Father. He rejoices to find you love the Church and the common Father of the Faithful so much, that you are saddened by the losses and calamities which they have suffered, and that you often pray that they may again enjoy peace and prosperity of every kind.

"As you cannot take part in the Lord's battles, continue to help those who fight by

your prayers ; persevere in the love of religion, which your excellent mistresses have so carefully taught you, receive their counsel with docility, and follow their example."

The letter closes with the papal benediction.

VI

SUPERIOR-GENERAL. FIRST TERM OF OFFICE, 1858-1867

A GREAT event was now about to take place in the life of Madame Flore; it is thus briefly recorded in the Annals (20th September 1858). "Madame Olympiade directed our Institute as Superior-General for eighteen years. She had carried out important works, and humbly begged leave to retire. Her request was granted, but in order that her zeal and talents might not be buried in the earth, she was entrusted with the direction of our Convent at Mouscron."

On the following day the Chapter met, under the Presidency of the Founder of the Institute, and proceeded to elect a Superior-General.

After reading the part of the rule which treats of the office of Superior-General, the

Ladies Capitular withdrew into the voting-hall ; in less than an hour the bell of the chapel rang, and they repaired thither in procession, Madame Flore walking last, as the newly elected Superior-General. The installation followed immediately ; the Altar was decorated as for a festival ; Madame Flore seated herself in the choir, and Canon Van Crombrugghe, as the Bishop's delegate, addressed to her the following questions :—

I. Are you sincerely resolved to act in all things according to the desire and teaching of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church ?

II. Do you consent to govern the pious family of Mary and Joseph ?

In a firm and gentle tone, though tinged with emotion, Madame Flore made answer, promising to observe the rules, and to protect them against any attempt at innovation. Then the Canon blessed the ring and cross, and gave them to her, together with the symbols of authority, viz., the seal of the Institute, the keys, and the Book of the Rule.

A touching ceremony follows. The Superior-General seats herself at the foot of the Altar, and the nuns in turn kneel before her, and promise obedience. One of the Sisters writes :

"I shall never forget the expression of Madame Flore during this kind of investiture that bound us to her. Her pallor, the tears falling from her eyes, the prostration of strength which appeared in her whole figure, made her a picture of sorrow. I really pitied her."

On leaving the chapel the nuns offered their congratulations, while telegrams were sent to all the other houses. As for Madame Flore, she could scarcely speak: "It seemed to me," she said later, "as if a great misfortune had just befallen me. I thought of the danger of such an eminent position, and dreaded it the more as I felt myself unfitted for it." Again: "Many would have filled it better. Experience will soon show that what I say is true. I have far more need to be guided than to guide others." After dinner, when all were assembled in the garden, the Canon turned to her, remarking upon the beauty of the scene: "Oh! Rev. Father," she answered, "all this is covered with crape to me."

Nevertheless, after the first moment of surprise, she recovered her habitual calm. "What an eventful week," she writes to the Canon; "I do not know how I can be so tranquil, so free from anxiety, so cheerful even, as

I am. It must be that the good God helps me, and that you have inspired me with courage. Yet I ought to look for trials, especially in my present position. I accept them then. God will clothe me with His strength, and you, Father, will guide me, and pray for me. . . .” She continues: “The Cardinal¹ has just left us; he came at the hour for Benediction. I met him accidentally in the corridor . . . he noticed my cross: ² “Ah! the cross; you must consult it often, it is a wise counsellor in the position you occupy.” “And a great support, your Eminence.” “And a source of great strength and light”; he paused, then added: “You are like the Bishops, the pectoral cross has been given you; it is not the one most difficult to bear.” “By no means, your Eminence; and the sight of the one will help me to carry the other.” “And to carry it with confidence and love,” he concluded joyfully; “then all the burden of trials and contradictions is changed into sweet reliance on a kind Providence, and, even as Superior-General, you may enjoy calm and peace.”

We notice, however, that Madame Flore

¹ Cardinal Sterckx, Archbishop of Malines.

² At that time the cross was worn by the Superior-General.

passes over in silence the letter she had received from the Cardinal on the day after her appointment : " I count upon you, Madame," he wrote, " as on a co-worker in my diocese. How much good may you not do by your humble mission. . . ." He continues : " I counsel you to show charity to your daughters. Cardinal de Bérulle has said : ' We are not placed in authority in order to exercise authority, but to exercise charity. It is the end and aim of the power that has been given us.' Be, then, truly a mother, entirely clothed with tenderness, pity, and love. If your authority rests on charity, all will be well. I do not doubt that it will be so."

Madame Flore's first act was to go into Retreat, and meditate on her grave responsibilities ; for three days she scarcely appeared in community, passing nearly the whole of her time in prayer before the Tabernacle. " Yesterday I made my Retreat," she writes to the Canon ; " I cast a glance over my life, and to-day I am about to lay open my soul to you, and implore your precious advice.

" I have a singular esteem for the life of a nun, especially for the Congregations who work for the salvation of souls ; this was the vocation of Christ Himself, and it seems to

me so high, so noble, so sublime, that there is nothing in the world to be compared to it. The thought, 'I am working for the good of souls,' gives me the keenest, highest joy, and every other kind of glory seems paltry beside it. . . ." Then follows a long self-accusation ; afterwards she continues : " Be so kind, Rev. Father, as to enlighten me where I am wrong, and to teach me what I need to reform as Superior. I earnestly desire to keep within my prerogatives. If I err on either side, please tell me. I only ask for order—that each official should fill her position in fact as well as in name, and that a good understanding may reign throughout."

One of the most important duties of the Superior-General is the Visitation of the Convents. Towards the close of the year, she writes to the Canon : " Since you think it well, I will begin the tour of the Convents. I own I am a little frightened at the thought of the wisdom, prudence, gentleness, and zeal—in a word, of all the virtue—I shall need to make these visits fruitful. This thought disconcerts me a little. Please pray for me, Rev. Father."

A few letters written at this time, show the affection with which the nuns regarded

the frail, young Superior who came to visit them. "Her presence filled us with joy, inspirited us for work, called forth our gratitude to God. We threw our whole energy into the task of following her advice." Another writes: "It is impossible to imagine the effect of her appearance among the community. It was as if a Guardian Angel had come to throw a ray of light over our lives."

At Mouscron, where she had been Prioress some years before, the admiration of the nuns became reverential when they saw how much she had increased in virtue; her quickness of temper had given place to a great gentleness. One of the lay-sisters naïvely expressed their feeling. "Why are you looking at me so earnestly, Sister?" inquired Madame Flore a little puzzled. "Oh! I was thinking how much you had improved." "Take care, Sister," said the quick-witted Superior, "one must be quite dead not to feel the odour of incense."

At Mouscron and Alost the nuns had taken advantage of her visit to anticipate her Fête (St Flore), and offer their kind wishes. She replies: "I am a triumphal march. I was fêted at Mouscron, I was fêted yesterday, I am fêted to-day; I am fêted where I am, I am

fêted where I am not. Ah! my dear daughters, what must the fête of Heaven be! We shall all be there I trust in the splendour of our marriage robes, with our lamps alight, and singing the Canticle that Virgins alone can sing."

To Sister Raphael she writes: "Be glad, my dear daughter, be merry and glad. Why should we not be merry! Are we not the happiest creatures in the world!"

To a Sister who was inclined to look on the dark side of life, she writes: "I wish you a holy Advent. We are allowed to sigh at this season, provided it be in concert with the Patriarchs and Prophets, and that we smile at the same time as we think of the coming of the Infant Jesus."

Christmas came: "My dear daughters, I await you at the Crib at midnight. Let us go there to adore and caress the Divine Babe. May He be born in us more beautiful, radiant, and strong than we have ever known Him. May His little hands draw from His little and vast heart all the blessings that we need."

As she was on the point of leaving Mouscron, she received a message from Canon Van Crombrughe, asking her to break

her homeward journey at the House of the Josephites at Melle. To her great joy, the first person she met there was the Canon himself. "I thought it was an apparition," she said, "and my joy was so great that it brought tears to my eyes." At this time Madame Flore was occupied with the project of rebuilding the house at Alost, and no doubt the interview had been arranged in order that she and the Canon might study, on the spot, the plan of the large College at Melle. There was one sorrowful circumstance connected with this interview—the failing health of the Canon,—and the fear of losing him took hold of Madame Flore from that day.

Yet she wrote cheerfully on her return to Coloma: "I am still full of wonder at all I saw at Melle. The extent of the buildings, their ingenious arrangement, the beauty of the architecture. . . . But what seemed to me most admirable at Melle was your great kindness. I am still quite bewildered, penetrated by it, and there is nothing I would not do to satisfy you, to avoid grieving your heart. Please do not be offended by my frankness. You are my only Father, I have no other in the world, and the other day my

heart was a little contracted, and it did me great good to see you and talk to you." She was alarmed at the labours and fatigues of the aged priest: "Your children are always glad to receive your advice and encouragement, but I entreat you not to tire yourself on our account, at least not on mine; I should be distressed to cause you the least fatigue."

Later in the year the Canon came to Coloma for two days; it was his last effort to revive the courage of his spiritual daughters. The closing words of his address to them, delivered in a voice trembling with emotion, were almost inaudible. "The years advance for your Father. My age, and the failure of my strength warn me that I have only a few days to pass in this world. The one thing I ask of God at the close of my life is that He will deign to establish in our hearts together with love of Him, a perfect union in one faith, one hope, and one charity."

After he had left, Madame Flore was occupied with the thought of the blow which threatened the community, but her letters to the Canon breathed only cheerfulness and hope. "We are counting upon your return in the spring, Rev. Father. Already the

swallows have come, heralds of spring; our groves are breaking into leaf, and our lawns scattered over with the white heads of the daisies; everything is becoming green, putting forth young shoots; everywhere there is singing, and the sweet scent of flowers. Only the lilacs are wanting to make it seem like May. I love to hope that by that time your eyes will be recovered, and you will be able to rejoice in this pleasant return of spring."

The 19th March (1859) was the Silver Jubilee of her Profession. She writes: "How many blessings hast Thou lavished upon me, O my Divine Master . . . and I, how have I shown my love? So many favours received, I have written them on sand, and the wind of levity has effaced them. Chosen from childhood by Thine infinite tenderness; called to the religious life at the age of sixteen, I have done so little in return for Thine unspeakable kindness." Again, in a letter to the Canon: "The remembrance of my holy Profession penetrates me, it flows into my soul, and touches me as on the first day." Cardinal Sterckx came to congratulate her. "I had never dared to hope for this favour," she writes; "he spoke of our Institute and of

its work, and of its Founder, saying—Ah! saying what!—stop your ears, Rev. Father—saying that the Dean of the Chapter of St Bavon is an example and oracle to the clergy of Ghent—observe *oracle*. We talked for nearly an hour; he was troubled and anxious about the affairs of Italy. . . .”

To one of the nuns she also speaks of Italy: “How God is trying the Holy Father! Humanly speaking, there is no way of escape from the situation. Sursum Corda! Christ has lost none of His power. He commands events as He commanded the waves, and will subdue them in His own time.”

At the close of the year (1859) when the Piedmontese annexation seemed imminent, she urged her nuns to offer daily their prayers and good works to avert this great injustice. “Let us implore God to hear us. He is goodness and power, and His refusals are often only delays. . . .”

While thus occupied with the troubles of the Holy See, Madame Flore did not lose sight of the interests of her religious family, and especially at this time of the needs of the Convent of St-Josse-ten-Noode. The Sisters were badly housed, cramped for room, and

unable to extend their work. Already, in 1858, Madame Flore had written: "God be praised! We have just received a most opportune favour; the house we longed for is for sale." The purchase was concluded, but the tenant, taking advantage of an ambiguous clause in the lease, refused to leave. "We would gladly resign ourselves to wait," Madame Flore writes to the Canon, "but March is the time when we should leave here. What is to be done? Where shall we put ourselves? The matter gives me much anxiety." At last the Baron de Bounder consented to an arrangement. "God be blessed, my dear Sisters," writes Madame Flore, "in a few days you will be in your own beautiful house. Remove quickly. I am looking forward to find a house well organised and well furnished, joyful faces, and grateful hearts full of wonder at the Divine goodness." The removal was most picturesque: "All the school-furniture — desks, chairs, wardrobes, tables, etc.—were piled upon the spring-carts, and the whole protected by coarse coverings; the carts went slowly on, the Sisters following a few paces behind. A storm was raging, the sky was black, there was thunder and lightning.

Suddenly the wind lifted the coverings, and an avalanche of heavy objects fell to the ground with a loud crash." Another Sister writes gaily : " We were most kindly received ; people at their doors and windows greeted us with smiles ; mothers made their little children wish us ' Good morning ' ; a gentleman much respected in the town came to welcome us, full of courtesy. I think, however, we must have presented a laughable spectacle, with our umbrellas inside out, our veils flying towards the four corners of the earth, and our scapulars turning like the sails of a windmill."

On the 25th September (1859) Madame Flore presided for the first time at the Profession of one of her daughters : " What a sweet, holy, touching ceremony !" she writes to the Canon, " this giving of one's whole self to God has always seemed to me most affecting, but how much more so to-day, when I am the Mother of these dear children. I have truly felt, in the supernatural order, the pride and joy of parents at their daughter's marriage."

About this time Madame Flore made various appointments. Madame Clementine became Mistress-General, while retaining for a time the direction of the Convent at Alost.

This Sister, a hard worker from the first, and whom death found still at work, was admirably fitted for the position. Quick-witted, amiable, and of far-reaching intelligence, she joined to these qualities a touching kindness of heart and deep faith. Her high spirits were inexhaustible; as Mistress-General she was often summoned to Coloma, and each time obeyed with renewed delight: "From the moment I set foot in Coloma," she said, "I cease to be Superior, I am a school-girl on a holiday." She had a wonderful gift for relating anecdotes, yet would pass in a moment to the gravity of the Council, bringing to it the light of her long experience, and an intelligent grasp of the aims of the Institute. She had an imperturbably good opinion of all that concerned her own Convent, and Madame Flore would laughingly tell her that "love is blind, even under a nun's guimpe." The Sisters would ask her in jest: "Rev. Mother, how is such a thing done at your house," and, while she saw through the strategem, she would reply with the utmost gravity, embellishing all her former eulogy. Her letters breathe filial tenderness, delicacy of feeling, and a joyous acceptance of the trials of her charge. Once

when she had assumed the duties of house-keeper in place of a Sister who was ill: "How can I get through this?" she writes, "not a notion of accounts! Not a notion of prices! I who have always looked upon figures as my enemy! here I am finely caught." Madame Flore replies: "Courage, my dear daughter, I shall soon be with you to check your additions. Be prepared. Inspection of receipts, inspection of expenditure, who knows what phantasies of inspection will pass through my mind. Strange, to desire so eagerly to render service to people who do not ask for it!"

Christmas shone like a light from Heaven over the Convent where Madame Clementine ruled. "We had yesterday our traditional feast. Eighty little children at the foot of the Crib, forming a delightful choir of angels, singing to Jesus, a beautiful initiation of these little ones in the supernatural life . . ."; and Madame Flore in reply urges her not to forget to give kindly advice to the mothers, as well as sweets and caresses to the children. "We cannot too often recall moral truths to this generation, absorbed as it is in earthly cares."

The story of this nun's vocation is singular.

While quite young she was attracted by the work of education, but would probably never have devoted herself to it, had it not been for the advice of Madame Flore.

One day a Brother of the Christian schools was crossing a street in Valenciennes, where Madame Clementine was then living ; he was walking in a quiet, meditative way, when a band of students assailed him with cries of "Ignorantin! Ignorantin!"¹ He turned round, and, with great dignity and benevolence, bowed to the group who had insulted him. Struck with the mildness and charity of this man, Madame Clementine exclaimed : "I, too, will be an Ignorantine." She entered upon her studies with enthusiasm, devoting to them all the time not required for her religious exercises. Her favourite science was botany ; she never came to Coloma without carrying away a quantity of herbs, crammed into her little valise. Even to old age, if the word can be used of one who never bore the usual marks of age, she delighted in helping the children to arrange their collections of plants. She watched the progress of science and invention with intense pleasure, and once remarked that

¹ A member of a fraternity teaching rudiments.

a magnificent versicle might be added to the inspired Canticle of Daniel:—"Railways, Telegraph, Telephone, bless ye the Lord! Machinery and mechanics, marvellous inventions of the nineteenth century, and all ye dazzling rays of modern science, bless ye the Lord!"

Above all science, however, she loved the interests of her Divine Master. "My dear daughter," Madame Flore writes to her, "let us serve the cause of God. Your position gives you the opportunity of doing great good. Animate the courage of your old pupils; lead them to be active, large-hearted, generous, to recognise the duties of supervision and example that devolve upon them. Let them learn what God requires of them in this age of increasing scepticism, and fit themselves to carry it out." In accordance with this advice, Madame Clementine strove to extend the Congregation of old pupils, formed in 1840; she established a library for them, to which she admitted some good novels. "Our girls are not nuns," she would say; "a little tolerance will prevent their seeking pasture elsewhere."

In 1860, Madame Flore's presence was urgently needed at the Convent of the Holy Angels at Brussels; the work having grown,

the nuns had taken another house in the Rue Marais, and this in turn had become too small. The lease was now about to expire, and the nuns had failed in an attempt to acquire a large and suitable house which they had in view. "The opportunity we have just lost seems to us an irreparable misfortune," writes Madame Flore ; "but in the designs of God—who knows? I greatly love Divine Providence, Who guides all things, and relieves us of anxiety. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean that I would do nothing but raise my hands to Heaven. I have acted as human wisdom directed, and made all possible efforts. God has not willed it. I do not lose confidence in Him, and I await His word."

This "word" was given in the following May. For nine days the nuns had prayed, practised mortifications, given bread to the poor ; one Sister had denied herself coffee in the morning during the whole Novena. At the close, the news fell upon them like a bomb that the buildings and gardens adjoining the Convent were for sale. It remained to be seen whether they could at one stroke buy this property, and also the house they were living in. Three attempts were made without success. Madame

Flore sent for the notary : " Make a last effort." " Impossible, Madame, he will show me the door." " Take the risk notwithstanding." " He has resisted three consecutive assaults." " Never mind, return to the charge." The lawyer proceeded to carry out her wishes with a very bad grace ; to his surprise the owner expressed a wish to sell the property, and that on terms most advantageous to the nuns. " God be praised," exclaims Madame Flore, " it is incredible, almost miraculous ! Henceforth, my child, we are in our own house, and with a free hand, that is to say, with every facility to make alterations." Some of the alterations were necessary in order to make the building suitable for a Convent. As long as the nuns were merely tenants, they were obliged to respect the princely opulence of the house. Thus, in the refectory, while taking their frugal meal, they could see themselves from head to foot in mirrors with carved frames ; in other rooms were panels painted with representations of mythological subjects, or trophies of war, or the chase. To destroy these artistic and historic treasures would have been an act of vandalism not to be thought of ; it was decided to draw simple

curtains in front of them, which remain to the present day.

In July 1860, Madame Flore on behalf of the Institute forwarded a letter and offering, expressive of their sympathy, to the Holy Father. "Silence belongs to little ones," so read the letter, "and especially when they are bound by vow to a life of humility and modesty. The Ladies of Mary would gladly take silence for their portion, did not their deep affection for the Vicar of Christ impel them to pour the sorrows of their hearts into his afflicted heart. Powerless to show their devotion in any other way, they lay hold of the means granted to the weak: they pray, they teach the young girls entrusted to their care to pray—together, mothers and children, they implore Heaven to frustrate the designs of the wicked, and to restore piety and religion to the earth."

Prayer preceded and followed the sending of the letter. "What may we not ascribe to prayer!" exclaims Madame Flore; "the Maccabees were not wanting in bravery, but, it is said, they fought more by their prayers than by their arms."

The reply of the Pope filled her with grati-

tude : " Good news ! from Rome ! Rev. Father ! The kindest and most fatherly letter ! Our hearts are full of wonder and gratitude, and I can scarcely write. A great Festival here on Sunday, in honour of the occasion. . . . "

In 1862, Madame Olympiade (Prioress of Mouscron) finally retired : " Your reply has greatly edified me, but not at all surprised me," Madame Flore writes ; " I know you are too noble-minded to desire a purely nominal post. It is *work* you would have ; you are willing to serve in retirement, but not to be unoccupied." How much had Madame Flore herself longed to return to the life of a simple nun ! She writes freely on this subject to Madame Olympiade : " May God supply my deficiencies, and withdraw me also before I die from the too vivid light in which I live."

In the same year she visited Mouscron, where the new Prioress had been appointed, and was received with great rejoicing. She remained there ten days. The day before she left, she received a visit from an old pupil which gave her great joy. This girl was of a fine, generous disposition, but circumstances, combined with her somewhat worldly habits, had kept her apart from the nuns after she left school.

As soon as the first greetings were over, she said: "Madame, I have great news for you; guess!" "I am not clever at guessing. You are going to be married?" "I am going into a Convent." "Where?" "At Carmel." "*You!*" exclaimed Madame Flore in astonishment; and after further conversation, in which she pointed out the hardships of the life of a Carmelite nun, she added: "I did not give you credit for so much courage."

"I owe it to you," said the girl; "you wonder at this. One day you said to me, 'Out of God you will find nothing but emptiness and grief'; when I left Coloma, I had forgotten these words; a sorrow which I felt keenly brought them to my mind; and behold! to-morrow the doors of Carmel will close upon me." "I congratulate you, then, and I bless you," said Madame Flore; "Be happy! forget the onions of Egypt." "Yes, but not the inhabitants of Coloma. I owe my Promised Land to you, I will remember this."

Returning to Coloma, Madame Flore withdrew herself more and more from the things of the world. Unfortunately we have no longer the record of her spiritual life contained in her journal of retreat, as she discontinued it about

this time, only returning to it occasionally and in a reserved tone. "There comes a time," she writes, "when we must prune away many things from our life, when we no longer need so many notes, so much reading. Human language! The book *par excellence* is the heart of the Divine Master. Read that book."

Again: "At our age, my dear daughter, the certainty of experience is acquired, calm reigns, we know our duty. We have no longer the taste or desire for books. We say: What can they teach me that I do not already learn in God? Let Him alone be my Teacher and my Light. I do this, and withdraw myself as much as I can into my own heart to converse with Him."

The most important result of the visit to Mouscron (1862) was that several of the girls resolved to embrace the religious life.

One of them, Marie de Geyter, a girl of sixteen, upon whose face early sorrows had left a grave impression, thus relates the circumstances of her decision: "One day, as Madame Flore was looking over our exercise-books, her eye fell upon the word *Life*, in superb handwriting at the head of one of my themes. She began to speak of our short

life on earth, full of troubles, and passed on to speak of the heavenly life. Although young I had already heard these things before, but that face, that look, no, I had never seen them. Nothing since has ever struck me so much, and I remember how that night, in the silence and solitude of my little room, I thought over all that had been said, and thought too of several young girls whom I had known, and whom death had laid low, and who had warned me that I should one day share their fate. I felt the emptiness of everything in the world."

The previous year a child of thirteen had been won to the same resolve.

"Do you remember, mamma," she writes home about this time, "how I used to play at being a nun? I folded a piece of white linen over my forehead, threw an apron over my head as a veil, and with my hands crossed and in a dignified attitude, I entered upon my duties: 'Children, we are going to say our prayers. Pay attention, little girls,' and I put those who were not good in a corner, and caressed the others."

Madame Flore would gladly have received the open-hearted child, but the far-reaching consequences of the act necessitate at least some years of probation. Meanwhile

she did not lose sight of her ; indeed the girl herself seemed drawn to her by a secret intuition, and of her own accord kept up the correspondence, telling Madame Flore all her difficulties, and following her advice with the utmost docility. Many playful allusions were made to her project. One of the mistresses, surprising her in a fault, remarked, "As a future nun, you ought to behave better." The words struck home. The girl coloured deeply, and the amendment was lasting.

While these little grains germinated on the frontier, others ripened in the fertile soil of the novitiate. There were twenty-three novices at this time. Their vocations presented the greatest variety ; some had come in the white robe of their youthful innocence ; to others God had revealed Himself suddenly as He did to Saul ; others again had been led by sorrow to withdraw from the world. Among these last was Sister Augusta. Early left an orphan, she had been placed under the care of the Ladies of Mary by her uncle and guardian. Little by little she became inspired with the desire to be a nun, and at last formally asked her guardian's leave ; it was refused. She was well-born, distinguished in appearance, of

a pleasing disposition, and an heiress; her hand had already been much sought after. "I am scarcely eighteen," she writes to Madame Flore, "and they are already talking of my being settled in life; they wish me to marry. Fancy me, me! a married lady!" Nevertheless she was attracted by the advances of a gentleman connected with her family, and soon came to love him as a brother, not suspecting any warmer feeling on his part. He made her an offer, and she accepted; but, as she afterwards related, at the moment of uniting herself to him, a strange revulsion of feeling took possession of her, her whole frame trembled, and she exclaimed as if urged by some irresistible impulse: "My God! what have I done!"

What she had done, death was soon to undo. The feeling to which we have referred passed quickly away, the wedding tour was gaily begun, and the two young hearts overflowed with conjugal tenderness; but on reaching Venice, the husband fell ill, and after a few days of great suffering, all was over, and the bride was left a widow and overwhelmed with grief at the age of twenty.

The desire of a more perfect life again

awoke in her, and within a year she begged admission to the Institute. After a prudent delay, the request was granted, and, smiling amid her tears, she came to Coloma accompanied by her mother-in-law and her guardian, both of whom grudged a sacrifice they could not understand. Madame Flore came forward to meet her: "Ah! my dear child, God has His own designs." "How kind of you still to be willing to receive me," she answered, "it is like entering Paradise. Only, be careful before my mother-in-law, she must not see how glad I am"; and Madame Flore listened with a smile, while the elder lady urged her to let her know at once in case her daughter-in-law should change her mind. The future Sister offered her jewels and rich wedding presents to the Queen of Angels, and henceforth until death sought nothing but Jesus crucified; in memory of her late husband and as a last token of her affection, she was allowed to take the name of Augusta.

It is the custom in the Institute for a postulant to renew her baptismal vows on the Sunday following her admission.

"Do you renounce Satan, the world and its vanities?" asked Madame Flore.

“Yes, I renounce them.”

“And all its pomps and works?”

“Yes, I renounce them also with my whole heart.”

These responses, which form part of the ceremonial, sum up the rest of Sister Augusta's life. Once admitted to the novitiate, she never cast a look back; she returned to the joyous life of her school-days, and the observances were not hard to her. Though accustomed to society, to be waited upon, and to every kind of delicacy, she now loved nothing so much as to serve others, and to be the last of all.

Sometimes great courage was shown by parents who offered their daughters to the novitiate. A gentleman, connected with the family of Canon Van Crombrugghe, brought the last of four daughters whom he had successively given to God. “Ah! monsieur,” said Madame Flore, “I am glad you have given your consent.” “God is the master, Madame,” he answered simply, “I had no choice.” “He will bless your sacrifice.” “*Sacrifice*, yes; my heart is sad, but we Christians were not baptised for our pleasure, and the good God never professed to impose easy duties upon us.”

Often the mothers themselves brought

their daughters to Madame Flore, and then a touching scene took place, the two mothers weeping together, and the one trying to console the other ; Madame Flore, instead of pitying would offer congratulations, and seldom failed to raise the courage of the other lady.

Once, however, a novice met with a long opposition. In 1864 a young girl was providentially brought to Coloma ; we say providentially, because, her father having abandoned his faith, it seemed little likely that he would entrust his daughter to the care of nuns. At first the girl was very unhappy ; she was of a dreamy disposition, and inclined to vain regrets ; gradually, however, her sadness was dispelled, her tastes changed, and she seemed attracted to the work of education. Her father, an officer in the Belgian army, had other views for her, and as soon as she had left school he introduced her into society, taking her from one place of amusement to another, and apparently devoting her whole existence to gaiety. The new life fascinated her, and a year had scarcely elapsed when she brought to Madame Flore the news of her approaching marriage. She had expected reproaches, but Madame Flore made none. The gentleman

to whom she was engaged was true to his religion, of irreproachable character, and of a disposition likely to make his wife happy—it remained only to offer congratulations, and Madame Flore offered them.

What strange changes occur in life! Suddenly, without warning, death snatched from the young betrothed girl the desire of her heart. Later she came again to Coloma: "My kind mother came to meet me," she relates; "I threw myself into her arms, and told her all the details of what had befallen me, and drew courage from her sympathy. The girl remained four days at Coloma; all her old desire of the religious life returned with greater intensity than before; she tried to drive it away, but in vain. The rest of the narrative we give in her own words: "An opportunity arose of telling my father of my project. I had received an invitation to a soirée. "Why do you not accept it?" he asked. "Because I wish to have done with all these things." "Oh! people do not break with the world at your age. The future has many happy days in store for you." "Perhaps," I answered, gathering courage, "but in any case it will not be in the world." My father started: "Do you speak seriously?"

he asked, looking at me in astonishment and anger. "Very seriously." "You would be mad enough to give up everything?" "I would be mad enough." "You would sacrifice your youth, future, freedom?" "I would sacrifice them. . . ." Weeks and months passed, bringing with them daily some painful scene, some short, cutting remark, or else gentle reproaches, expressions of tenderness, and entreaties to wait at least until his death. One day he ended abruptly: "If you will go—go then." She took him at his word, pale with sorrow, anxiety, and emotion, but resolved. Scarcely had she come among the nuns when she received a peremptory order to return. She obeyed. She asked herself whether she would ever be able to overcome her father's determination, when, by one of those mental changes of front of which God holds the secret, he gave, of his own accord, a full and free consent; to this was soon added his blessing, and a renewal of his affection.


Here the narrative would end, but we will add a consoling fact which Madame Flore ascribed to the prayers of St Joseph. As we have said, the novice's father had long given up the practice of his religion, and it

was a continual subject of prayer to his daughter and to Madame Flore that he might be brought back to share their holy faith. In March 1870, they confided their cause to St Joseph, and agreed to look upon it as a sign that their prayers were answered if the girl's father should come to the Convent on St Joseph's Day (19th March), and remain for Benediction. Again we give the narrative in the daughter's words.

"The 19th, my father asked to see me in the parlour. I went, trembling all over; just as I entered, the bell rang for Benediction. My heart beat quickly as I said: 'Father, I must leave you, it is the hour for Benediction.' 'I am going with you, my daughter,' he said in a decided tone. I thought I should have fainted; it was the sign agreed upon—my cause was gained—my father saved. I forgot to say I was fulfilling the duties of sacristan; as I entered the choir in attendance on the priest, I looked at my father. His head was bowed—motionless—he was praying—his noble features showed an emotion difficult to restrain. I cannot express the happiness I felt, and I poured out my prayers and tears at the foot of the Altar."

Need we add that from this time their mutual affection increased. Madame Flore made an exception of the Rule in their favour, and allowed them to meet and converse together every week. The father brought his daughter books, scientific reviews, sometimes ornaments for the Church, or flowers for the Altar ; the daughter gave him her counsel, her prayers, and her most tender affection.

Although earnestly desiring that the members of the Institute should be increased in number, Madame Flore never sought to influence any one to become a nun ; if a girl of her own accord offered herself, she was full of joy, yet she ever acted prudently, remembering that a vocation is a matter of grave import, and that the Rules of an Institute are not always suitable to those who wish to enter it. Thus addressing the relative of one of the Sisters, she said : “Yes we will receive [the young girl] provided it be God’s will that she should belong to our Congregation. If, after examining our Constitutions, her Confessor has the least doubt on this point ; if she herself desire it, let her renounce the Ladies of Mary. I say this very clearly, my dear daughter, solely that I may not go contrary to the Divine



influence. The door of our Institute will be opened wide for her."

Another girl who desired to be a nun was the sole support of her mother, who, however, told her that she would not oppose a clear manifestation of the Divine Will. Madame Flore advised her to remain at home, and to look upon her mother's position as rendering it morally impossible for her to carry out her purpose.

Many years later, we find her dissuading an old pupil from entering the Institute. She was a fine character, pious, intelligent, and of distinguished appearance; she would have made an excellent nun, and found in religion a shelter for her youth, and safety for the future—but was it her vocation? Madame Flore feared that the sad circumstances of the girl's life had influenced her decision.

"Our dear American persists in her intention," she writes to one of the nuns. "Poor child! I pity her. Nevertheless I force myself to moderate her desire, not wishing to expose her to regrets when too late, and not believing her capable of a lasting renunciation. The religious vocation is not binding as a condition of salvation, and it is a hundred times better to devote ourselves to the service of God in

the world, than to embrace a more perfect state to which we are not called." The future proved that she was right. The girl and her sister returned to their own country (Guatemala), made excellent marriages, and became true mothers to their children.

On the other hand, Madame Flore made no difficulty in receiving a young orphan, who was brought to her just as she was leaving Mouscron.

"Is it true, my child, that you wish to go into a Convent?" she asked.

"Yes," the girl replied resolutely.

"And why?"

"That I may teach little girls, like the Sisters."

Her air of determination pleased Madame Flore, who admitted her a few years later.

After the novices had been received, they remained an object of her constant thought. Kind and considerate to all, she was especially so to them. Their high spirits never tired her: "Let them alone," she would say, "mirth is healthful." In recreation time she loved to see them enter into their games with zest, and recalled Canon Van Crombrughe's direction to the mistress of the novices to "be

very sparing of remonstrances in times of relaxation." Sometimes, during the holidays, she would leave the group of professed nuns, and go disguised among the white veils ; when she was discovered, there was a shout of delight, and a ransom was exacted for her release.

In 1864 she opened courses of studies for the novices similar to those in the government normal schools ; she presided over them, and herself gave Conferences on the work of education. Later she added lessons in the practice of teaching, which were given—often somewhat indifferently by the shy novices—before the community.

Madame Flore usually took up the defective lesson, correcting the faults of method by example, and in this way she contributed not a little to give the young Sisters a sound practical training. After this she would say : "And now for a little freedom," and would carry them with her through the realms of literature, history, or art, drawing from her inexhaustible memory the most curious and varied anecdotes and narratives. Last of all came the examination, an ordeal which they somewhat dreaded, but through which she rigorously compelled them to pass.

Occasionally she gave special instruction to the novitiate, her theme almost invariably being the happiness of the religious vocation. "My dear children, you are now in Paradise. The world does not account it so, it pities the victims of Convents, and laments over them. How the world is deceived! I would compare the religious life, and the novitiate especially, to the thorn-bush of St Francis of Sales; to free himself from a temptation, the Saint threw himself into a thorn-bush, and in a moment the thorns were changed to lovely roses. So it is with the novitiate; from afar it looks like a thorn, but near at hand, a rose-bush. . . . To work then. Is there a sacrifice to be made—make it; an aversion to be overcome—overcome it; a cross to embrace—embrace it. God is worth all the trouble; to serve Him is to reign."

Of great breadth of view, she would have nothing narrow in the discipline of the novitiate, or of her Convents generally; she objected to any attempt "to put souls in uniform." Involuntary failings, arising from age or disposition, she treated with indulgence. Thus she writes to the Superior of a Convent to which she was transferring a nun: "Receive

our young Sister with open arms ; yes, make her welcome, the first impression lasts. She is of an amiable, joyous disposition, but a little averse to restraint. Do not apply all our Rules to her in their full rigour. Lead her gently. Be velvet to her." Again a few days later : "Once more I recommend [the young Sister] to you. She is fond of laughter, and easily finds occasions of merriment. If she laugh a little too much, close your eyes, let her alone. Laughter does not accord badly with our state, and some people see in it a mark of serenity of soul."

She was equally ready to excuse youthful faint-heartedness. A novice came to her all in tears : "My dear child, what is the matter?" "I am distressed because my father has gone away. I shall never learn to detach myself from my own people." "But, my dear child, who asks you to do that? Religion does not forbid family affection ; how could it? Can we destroy the feelings that God Himself has put into our heart? No, no, love your father, but let this love be subordinate to the love you bear to God ; and find again in Him those whom you love."

Very similar was the answer she gave to a

postulant more than ten years later. This girl arrived quite unexpectedly, bringing a letter of recommendation from her Confessor, on whose advice she came to Madame Flore; she did not know the nuns, and knew little of the Institute. She herself has given the account of the interview.

"So you would like to join us in our work, Mademoiselle," said Madame Flore.

"That is what I wish."

"I am told you used to love the world."

"Oh! that love is quite vanished."

"You do not look as if you were weeping over your lost illusions."

"I am rejoicing; I have learned too well what the world is worth."

"Do you know also what the religious life is worth?"

"I have some idea."

"You expect great blessings?"

"I expect great trials too."

"And the prospect does not deter you?"

"I can be happy in spite of that."

"I see you are initiated into the mystery of the Cross. Can you obey?"

"I prefer to command, but it will suit me very well also to obey."

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen."

"It is the beautiful age of life."

"They tell me so, I have had no experience of it. Is it also the beautiful age in religion?"

"Yes; do you know why?"

"No."

"Because it is the age of great passions, great struggles, and consequently great opportunities of denying oneself for Heaven."

"I am but at the beginning of this self-denial."

"You will make up for lost time. Entering religion is like going to California—a fortune is quickly made."

"I think so, if it were only in separating from one's own people." Here my eyes filled with tears.

"I have touched a sensitive chord, my child?" said Madame Flore.

"Alas! yes, Madame, on this point I must school my heart."

"Your parents consent to your entrance, do they not?"

"Yes, but they accuse me of ingratitude."

"Tell them clearly that you will only be separated from them in body; your thoughts

will follow them, your memory will remain with them."

"Is that permitted in religion?"

"Undoubtedly. It is not wrong to love your father and mother, and to suffer from being parted from them. Listen, I will give you some advice. Think often how you will find your family circle again in Heaven. Here it is broken, and passes away. In Heaven it will be formed anew, and will continue."

Madame Flore allowed the same freedom with regard to letters; not only did she permit the novices to write to their relations, but she urged them to do so; thus she considered that the feast of a father, mother, brother, or sister ought not to be passed over in silence, and, if necessary, she would be the first to remind the novice of the date.

A nun once showed her the resolutions she had made in Retreat, of which the first was: "I will detach myself from every affection in this world." "That is exaggerated," interposed Madame Flore quickly; "God allows us to love other things beside Himself; it is enough that it should be in Him and for Him. Here is an illustration from St Augustine. The love of God is like a river flowing through

a vast plain, all the streams, that is to say, all our other affections, throw themselves into this river and become its tributaries. There is the image and rule of our affections, keep to that."

Another sacrifice painful to those entering the religious state is the withdrawal of spiritual fervour; it often happens that the time following their entrance is marked by great supernatural joy; when this ceases, temptations ensue, and the novice asks herself if she should give up her vocation, change to another order, or change her occupations.

"Why do you wish to return to the world, my child?" Madame Flore asked one of the novices.

"I should meet with fewer difficulties."

"Who has told you that? Perhaps you would meet with more, as you would have left the life to which God called you. You wish for an end to your struggles? Is not this wishing to be crowned before you have fought? . . . then taking the novice's hands affectionately within her own: "Come, my little coward! stand on your honour! Instead of deserting the lists, brandish the sword! In the end will be the crown—the recompense—and peace."

In seeking in every way to make the novices happy, Madame Flore was but following out the views of the Founder of the Institute, who desired that the novitiate should be a Paradise, where the soul could live in joy and freedom in the companionship of her kind Master. How many times would Madame Flore quote the words, "God loveth a cheerful giver."

The heroism of sacrifice does not exclude happiness, and those who voluntarily embrace evangelical obedience should bring to their community life the tribute of a joyful heart.

.

Early in 1863, Madame Flore had earnestly commended to a Sister who was dying, a project which she did not then make known.

What was this project? The following letter, written shortly after, may perhaps explain.

"For some years, Rev. Father, it has been frequently in my mind that we ought to seek the Approbation of our Rules. What blessings, what peace would follow if this favour were granted; it would then be so simple a matter to govern. Kindly consider

✱

it, there would be no difficulty in arranging it. I pray our Lord to inspire you, and I offer you all the help in my power."

This letter expresses a wish dear to Canon Van Crombrugghe's heart, but his modesty was so great that he would never have put it into execution of his own accord ; it must be added that while approval from Rome is a favour, it is at the same time in one sense a restriction. The text of the Rules becomes fixed ; it is no longer possible to make the least change without the consent of the Sacred Congregation. Further, the Holy See does not usually at once grant approval of the Rules of any Institute ; there is first a Decree of Praise, then a Brief of Eulogy, preliminaries which occupy a long time.

Madame Flore replied to these objections : "There is no question of success in our case ; we have acquired experience with time, the Sacred Congregation will be satisfied on this point. During the forty years and more that our Institute has existed, we have had leisure to enter into the practical side of things ; it is only after much feeling of our way that the various parts of the building have been brought together, and put in their places."

After the project had been decided upon, it remained to draw up a clear and concise summary of the Rules, to be submitted to the Sacred Congregation. To this task Madame Flore consecrated her days, and even part of her nights. One or other of the nuns would share her labours, and while she ordered that coffee should be brought to the other Sister to drive away sleep, she herself would not take any: "Coffee goes to my head," she would say.

She began with a prayer, then gradually her face became animated, her eyes speaking, and her pen flew across the paper, filling several pages with that delicate and close handwriting that the nuns knew so well. Sometimes a timid knock at the door made her raise her head; it was one of the Sisters come to remind her of the lateness of the hour; she would then yield to the invitation to retire, but only to begin again in the morning. It is a fact deserving of record that Madame Flore seldom lost her gentleness of manner through her assiduity in her work; if a Sister found her very busy, and was about to withdraw, fearing to disturb her: "No, no, my child, come in," she would say, and listened kindly, without

betraying the least impatience by word or gesture.

At last she could breathe freely ; her manuscript drew to a close. In this summary, the aim of the Institute is first clearly stated ; it is “the perfection proper to each member of our religious family, and the Christian education of children.

“Our Congregation is governed by a Superior-General, who possesses all the powers necessary for the exercise of her duties ; it is she who judges, presides, orders, with whom resides all initiative and decision. All the others are under her.

“One of the points which most require her care is the choice of subjects to perpetuate the existence of our religious family, and here the spirit which animates us begins to appear. When a young girl offers herself to be admitted to our Society, the inquiry is chiefly made—not into her birth and fortune, points of extrinsic and little value—but if she is pious and endowed with good sense, intelligence, and health. Even these are not the essential point—the future Spouse of Jesus Christ, she must before all things be animated by His Spirit. The time of probation is usually three months ;

at the end of this time, if the postulant obtain a majority of votes at the Council General, she is examined by the Bishop's delegate, and allowed to take the veil.

"This first step is solemn. The novice kneels at the foot of the Altar, and the voice of the Church, rising grave and majestic, interrogates her. . . .

" 'My daughter, what do you ask?'

" 'I ask to be allowed to dwell in this house of God all the rest of my life.'

" 'You must know that in order to be received into this pious Institute, you must be resolved to renounce the world and yourself, to bear your cross daily, and to consecrate yourself to the service of the Church, according to the Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph.'

"Then the priest reiterates the inquiry: 'Are you prepared to fulfil these duties, and do you persevere in the request you have made?' If the postulant has the courage to do this, she replies in the affirmative, and the ceremony closes with the celebration of the Holy Mass.

"A novitiate of two years follows, and then the novice is admitted to temporary profession ;

that is to say, she takes the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience for five years. She is now the Spouse of Christ, a privileged member of the fold of the Church, and a member also of a family formed upon the model of the Holy Family; Jesus, Mary, and Joseph becoming her ideal of perfection. But simultaneously with these high prerogatives, a series of trials unroll themselves. From afar, the greatness of the enterprise may have aroused her enthusiasm; near at hand, she feels the burden of duties which her vocation lays upon her. Will she be able to continue to lead this life? The Church puts the question to her at the end of five years, and, at a word, she can return to the world. If she persevere in her intention, an indissoluble contract binds her for life, and the sacrifice is complete."

Madame Flore treats of all the rules under the title, "Of Religious Life in Community."

"One of our most valued observances is the Psalmody of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, a tribute of homage to the Divine Majesty, through the mediation of the Queen of Heaven, which is daily recited. . . . We often invoke Mary, speak only after having saluted her, and wear her livery of white and

blue; every Saturday we offer to her a special tribute of love and gratitude, and we dedicate the month of May to her.

“It is, however, chiefly to the adorable Person of Jesus Christ that our hearts converge: ‘Come to me all ye that labour and are wearied, and I will refresh you.’ We know that this most loving invitation is especially addressed by Jesus to souls which are consecrated to Him, and many times in the day we go to reanimate our courage at the foot of the Altar.”

On the subject of the Evangelical Counsels the Constitutions read as follows; first, as regards poverty: “Our Divine Lawgiver, our King, our Model, our Heavenly Spouse extols this holy and voluntary poverty by His doctrine and example. ‘Blessed are the poor,’ He said; and again, ‘Lay up for yourselves treasures which rust does not consume.’

“Following these divine instructions, and in spite of the contrary appearances to which the decorum of their state compels them to submit, the Ladies of Mary practise a poverty which is little below that of the most austere Institutes.”

Then, as regards chastity: “Happy children

of a Virgin Mother, a Virgin Father, the daughters of Mary and Joseph vow to keep their heart, body, and soul pure and chaste for their Virgin Spouse. To safeguard the practice of this virtue, we have no hair-cloth . . . or severe fasts . . . instead, we have the subjugation of the senses, the spur of sacrifice, retreat, the avoidance of evil, and in general all that may preserve the angelic purity of our consecration."

Lastly, obedience: "Convinced, on the one hand, that perfection consists in fulfilling God's will, and, on the other, that by this heroic vow we shall always fulfil it, nothing disturbs the peace which our religious enjoy. Their life is freed from care, their last moments from anxiety. Their existence becomes a cloudless day, of which death is the evening, and the morrow eternal light."

"One distinctive feature of our Institute is our missionary zeal. To save souls by teaching, to help them to attain the supreme end of their destiny—this is our object."

Such is a summary of the Rules and Observances; nothing is left to chance, everything has its law fixed and unchangeable; it is to be noted, however, that this fixity does

not extend to the order of the day, which may bend to local necessities.

Before closing this chapter, we may remark how greatly Madame Flore venerated the Rules. Next to the Holy Gospels, they were the light which shed its rays on her path, and aided her to solve many difficulties. But the greater her reverence for them, the more eager was she that they should be maintained in all their integrity in the future, and for this purpose she sought the Approbation of the Holy See. In February 1864, she writes to the Canon: "Madame Clothilde, Madame Marcelline, and I, have just returned from the Cardinal [Cardinal Sterckx]. He received us most kindly, will help us with his influence at Rome, and will examine the Constitutions (slightly modified) which I left with him."

Cardinals Sterckx and Dechamps successively interested themselves in the matter. The following is the petition presented by Cardinal Sterckx. Madame Flore says: "Most Holy Father, we bless with all our heart the good Master, who has deigned to allow us a place in His vast field, and to work a little in the great Christian harvest. We are happy in His service, and we walk with

simplicity and confidence in the path He has traced for us. But what would be our joy, Most Holy Father, how great would be our confidence, with what renewed ardour should we be animated, if your Holiness would deign to examine our Statutes, and to give them a sanction which would render them more honourable in our eyes, would confer upon them greater authority, and guarantee their inviolability.

“In these unhappy times, when the Holy Church is persecuted, and your Sacred Person steeped in sorrow, our hearts, with those of all faithful Christians, are drawn towards you, Most Holy Father ; they desire that a closer tie should bind them to a Pontiff so generous and so sorely tried. May your Holiness deign to form this tie by a kind approval of our Rules. . . .”

The reply of the Sacred Congregation filled the nuns with joy ; for though only the ordinary Brief of Eulogy, it was expressed in terms which led them to believe that a full approval would follow. The Pope praised and recommended the Institute by the present decree, “deferring the full approval of the Constitutions to a more opportune time”—20th July 1864.

.

For some time past the health of the Founder of the Institute had given cause for anxiety, but no immediate danger was apprehended. A telegram filled the nuns with alarm; Madame Flore opened it and grew pale: "Anointed! my God! anointed!" It was too late to begin the journey to Ghent, and it was decided to wait until daybreak; but the journey was never undertaken, a second telegram bringing the news of the Canon's death. Madame Flore's first action was to throw herself at the feet of Jesus in prayer and tears; but as soon as the first grief was over, the thoughts of faith regained their sway. "Why look at things from the point of view of time," she writes, "let us look at them in the light of eternity. Our kind Father is in Heaven, let us love to think of him in the possession of eternal blessedness, happy for ever. What is this sad life? It has been said, 'We eat the bread of tears.' Ah! it is most true!" And a little later, "It will be a week to-morrow since we lost the best of Fathers. . . . I say to myself he is in Heaven, his life was that of a Saint; he carried out great works; his reward will be eternal . . . these thoughts console me. May

Jesus be glorified in the trial He has sent us." Again: "Need I say that I live in the companionship of our dear departed one. I gather together remembrances of him, I meditate on his virtues and his counsels. A thousand things remind me of him. The nuns, too, keep saying, 'If I had told him this or that.' But he sees and hears us from on high. How happy to find a refuge in this divine faith!"

A few weeks later she sent the following circular letter to her Convents:

"The Lord gave us a holy priest, a man after His own heart, to be our Founder and Father. The Lord has taken him away from us. Blessed be Thou a thousand times, O my God, for the inestimable gift Thou hast bestowed. Blessed be Thou likewise in the sad sacrifice Thou hast required. Shall I tell you, my dear Sisters, what a prudent guide, what a devoted friend, what a true Father we have lost. You know it. God presented him with choice graces, endowed him with precious qualities, adorned him with great virtues. His whole life was edifying and irreproachable; pious and submissive as a child, fervent and studious when at the College of St Achenl, as a priest he was on fire with divine love; and to

crown so noble a life, the infirmities and sufferings which came upon him called forth heroic patience. He rejoices in glory, excellent and holy priest. Oh! yes, let us have this confidence, let us give ourselves up to this joy. God so kind, so tenderly merciful, will have placed him among the just. It is the deep conviction of all who have known him; it is the especial feeling of all of us, his spiritual daughters."

One of the last consolations of the Canon had been the rebuilding of the Convent at Alost. In the first year of her office as Superior-General, Madame Flore had written: "There is much to be said as to the desirability of placing our Convent of St Joseph on a more worthy footing. It was there that you began to cultivate the field of the Father; for this reason it ought not to remain what it is. I feel quite ashamed when I compare it with the fine buildings at Brussels and at Coloma." After a long search the nuns found a suitable house. "We are only waiting for your 'yes,' Rev. Father," wrote Madame Flore, urging a prompt decision, "we may lose this splendid property; it is large enough for us all—from the nuns to the poor children—in the triple proportion we have at present."

But the Canon could not understand that the vicinity of a public square, in a fashionable part of the town, where fêtes were often held, should not be a disadvantage to a Convent.

The project fell through; it was the only disagreement that ever arose between Madame Flore and the Canon. "God understands His work," she wrote, trying to be resigned. "We should be in great danger of glorying in our undertakings if we always brought them to a successful issue smoothly and without effort. On the other hand, how often have we seen that failure is a grace, and that, while seeming to be against us, it is really rendering us a service, which we recognise later." In 1864 her wish was fulfilled, and the Convent at Alost completely rebuilt.

The house at Mouscron now claimed her attention. The Burgomaster succeeded in purchasing, on behalf of the nuns, an old casino, to which was attached a large piece of building ground. "The plans of the new Convent are already drawn out," wrote Madame Flore. "Madame Hélène is delighted . . . she explains and discusses the project with the architect—her eyes shine with pleasure, her finger runs along the fine red lines—here

are class-rooms, dormitories, further on the chapel, on the ground-floor the parlours, community-room, etc. ; everywhere ample ventilation ; the extent of the land gives her scope for carrying out her dreams."

Again, addressing Madame Hélène: "My dear Mother, let us be modest in our requirements. Do you know what St Francis of Sales calls luxurious Convents: 'A ridiculous monstrosity.' Nothing mean or contracted certainly, but also nothing sumptuous. Simplicity can very well be united to ample space and good proportions." She continues: "I advise you above all, Rev. Mother, to obtain a very complete estimate, and to keep to it carefully. I believe your architect is honest, but you cannot leave him entire liberty. Choose your builder carefully. It would be well to have a clerk of the works to examine the quality of the material, etc. ; however conscientious your men may be, they are exposed to the temptation of gain, and unless they are well looked after, they take advantage of you. You should also be careful to submit your plans to the Bishop. Communities are not allowed to build without the Bishop's approval." The foundation was



Reproduced from a Nels postcard, Brussels.

CONVENT OF THE LADIES OF MARY AT MOUSCRON.

[To face page 152.

laid in 1865, and the Convent was completed two years later.

It is sometimes thought that nuns are strangers to the practical side of life; the letter just quoted shows that this was not the case with Madame Flore. Some years before, while Prioress at Mouscron, it had fallen to her lot to guard the interests of the Convent. "I can quite understand," she writes to the Canon, "that Monsieur N—— should try not to lose in any way, but that he should wish to make a brilliant speculation at our expense; this is not merely a little unscrupulous, it is unjust. I shall speak to him about it—not in honeyed phrases like his own, but plainly. Do not be afraid, Rev. Father, I will express myself carefully. I have grasped the situation thoroughly."

To take another instance from Madame Flore's earlier days. In 1842, the town of Mouscron laid claim to the free use of several acres of land belonging to the Convent. Madame Flore returned a courteous, but absolute refusal. "It must be owned," she writes, "I invoked principles of jurisprudence somewhat at random, having but an imperfect knowledge of the question. What I do under-

stand is that we are as much interested in preserving the property of our house, as the authorities of Mouscron can be in preserving that of their town." Meanwhile she diligently applied herself to the study of the question, and was soon able to bring forward arguments in support of her position, which enabled her easily to gain her cause. The new and unexpected fact of a young Superior defending the material interests of her Convent soon became widely known in Mouscron, and from that time no further attempt was made to encroach on the property.

VII

SUPERIOR-GENERAL. SECOND TERM OF OFFICE,
1867-1876

MADAME FLORE was now approaching the end of her first term of office, and by a happy coincidence, the Convocation of the Chapter fell on the same year as the Golden Jubilee of the Institute.

In a circular letter she informs the various houses that the Jubilee Fête is fixed for 12th September 1867:

“Our dear Congregation counts to-day half a century of existence. Tender fidelity, generous love to Jesus Christ, filial confidence in our august patrons, religious affection for our Sisters; such are the accents of our souls. May we not send an echo of them to our venerated Father! Let us show him by our works that his family have received his spirit, and are walking in the path which he traced out, and made easy for us. . . . Let us profit

by this fête to temper our souls anew. Let us banish from our hearts all ingratitude, every word and act which is not in harmony with the dignity of our calling."

After the fête, the work of the Council begun, and Madame Flore was unanimously re-elected. As Monseigneur Lauwers¹ presented her to the community, he remarked: "It is a second lease that you have just signed, may there be a third and a fourth; for your daughters it will be a happiness ever old and ever new." "Say rather," interposed Madame Flore quickly, and colouring deeply, "a misery ever old and ever new."

In the following words she announced her election:—

"The Chapter-General has thought good to leave me in command. May the holy will of God be done! Such is the *fiat* that our Constitutions put upon my lips nine years ago, I repeat it now with the twofold sentiment of my ever-increasing incapacity, but of my confidence in God."

She continues: "My dear Sisters, let us be good to one another, be kind without measure. Is not the familiar and popular name which is

¹ Vicar-General to Cardinal Dechamps, Archbishop of Malines.

given by preference to God—the good God? Oh! for us He is not the Creator, the Supreme Being, the Almighty—He is the good God. The ancients called Him also the great God; but this epithet which keeps Him too far aloof from us, and makes Him the God of our intellect rather than of our heart, soon fell into disuse. . . . Listen to St Francis of Sales: ‘If an action had a hundred aspects, we should look at the most beautiful.’ Was it not also a Saint who gave this rule of kind and noble justice: ‘To believe good, the evidence of one witness suffices; to believe evil, that of three is not enough.’”

Among the decorations of the fête had been a miniature vessel, fully rigged, and painted in the three colours of the Institute—blue, white, and black; nuns were the crew, and an angel guided the helm. This was a symbol of the projected foundation in England which had been in Madame Flore’s mind from the time of her first election, but had been delayed on account of the necessity for providing for the existing houses.

In 1869 it was resolved to establish a Convent in London, and a house had already been chosen, when Madame Flore and Madame

Cecilia (the future Mother of the English Convent) came to England and, after examining the site, decided that it would be unsuitable, the neighbourhood not containing the class of children they sought to teach.

Meanwhile the Josephites of Croydon, a Congregation founded by Canon Van Crombrugghe, invited the nuns to join them there, and pointed out the prospect of success. It remained to obtain permission of the Bishop of Southwark, but this proved by no means easy. From the following conversation with Madame Flore, it is evident that Bishop Grant had been misinformed with regard to the aim of the Institute when he first promised his protection. "Madame," he said, "I take a very great interest in your community. What work do you propose to undertake in my diocese?" "To teach children, my Lord." "It is not the work I should wish you to take up. Devote yourselves rather to the care of the sick. Open an Orphanage." "I would represent to your lordship," replied Madame Flore a little disconcerted, "that our entire training is with the view to education; we should be failing in our aim." The Bishop, however, insisted, and Madame Flore left his

house somewhat uneasy as to the result of the interview. Happily an old pupil from Coloma was at this time in London—Lady Russell (Ellen Mulholland), the wife of the Lord Chief Justice. On hearing of the arrival of the nuns, she at once offered them hospitality at her house in Harley Street. Here Madame Flore could reflect on the contrasts of life as she saw her letters presented to her every morning on a gilded tray by a servant in livery, and was driven through the streets in a carriage with armorial bearings. She often laughed over these things with her young hostess, who had preserved all her simplicity of taste in the midst of her wealth. Lady Russell persuaded the nuns to settle in Croydon, and exerted herself to obtain the Bishop's consent, in which, however, she was not wholly successful; the Bishop at last declared that he would not hinder the work, if, as they hoped, God permitted it to succeed.

There was some risk in going forward on so frail a support, considering how indispensable to the vitality of a religious community is a good understanding with the Bishop under whom they work. After her return to Belgium, Madame Flore wrote a letter to Bishop Grant

which is a model of tact, firmness, and religious deference. A favourable reply having been received, three nuns were chosen for the foundation—the first foundation of the Institute in a foreign country. They were Mother Cecilia, Madame Adelaïde, and Sister Regina (a lay-sister).

Madame Cecilia, who was at this time forty years of age, had for ten years filled the office of Mistress-General at Coloma, and this responsibility had softened her energetic character. She was of British origin, spoke the language well, and was of dignified presence and gracious manner. Nothing could shake her confidence; cares and uncertainties produced in her no shadow of anxiety; obedience, no shadow of hesitation. Duty, authority, spoke—that was enough for her. She was above all punctual and orderly, so that Madame Flore would jestingly say that her portrait should be painted “representing her with a watch in one hand and a yard measure in the other.”

Madame Adelaïde was patient, cautious, diligent in making the best use of everything; the English admired her calm demeanour, and called her the “self-possessed lady.”



MADAME CECILIA (FOUNDRESS OF THE HOUSES OF THE LADIES OF
MARY IN ENGLAND) ON HER 78TH BIRTHDAY.

[To face page 160.]

Sister Regina was naturally frank, full of originality and enthusiasm, her high spirits were inexhaustible ; there was also the spiritual side to her character—the friend of mortification and sacrifice, always in quest of hardships to endure, who in the midst of a thousand contradictions declared “it is no matter,” with an expression magnificent in its courage. If she were overburdened with work—it was no matter ; if she were destitute of everything—it was no matter ; if she came across disappointments and worries—it was no matter. She had obtained from Madame Flore leave to deprive herself of butter for a year, in gratitude for having been chosen for the English Foundation.

On the day fixed, the community assembled in the chapel at Coloma, and Cardinal Dechamps solemnly blessed the three nuns, and consecrated them to Him Whose kingdom they sought to extend ; he also gave them a letter of introduction to Archbishop Manning, whom he had known in Rome.

At five o'clock they began their journey, and as long as they remained in sight, the nuns who were left behind waved their farewells ; but only Sisters Adelaïde and Regina saw them,

for Mother Cecilia never looked back ; she had long known of Madame Flore's project, and had promised to take part in the Foundation whenever she should be called upon. She was drawn to England, not by natural inclination, but because she considered there was a great work to be done there.

At Croydon, Father David, the parish priest, came courteously to meet them, and took them to the church ; by a happy coincidence the congregation were singing " Mater Amabilis " at the moment they entered, and it seemed as if Mary herself were welcoming her daughters. At the close of Benediction all eyes were turned upon them ; the people crowded to get near them, and climbed on benches to see them. The Queen of Sheba, with all her Eastern attendants, could not have excited more curiosity. On the previous Sunday, Father David had referred to the nuns in the kindest terms ; " fired with zeal for souls," and " not satisfied with work in their own country," they had " migrated, like birds of good omen, bringing with them to England the spirit of sacrifice and the love of children."

Afterwards they returned to the Presbytery, where they found the Rev. Superior of the

Josephites, who offered them every assistance in his power; thus for the second time they met the spiritual children of Canon Van Crombrughe, for the Sisters of St Joseph had extended hospitality to them at Ostend. Everyone spoke of their project. Good Father David was filled with enthusiasm, and believed that the golden age was about to begin for his parish. Happy Father David! Some people create imaginary troubles for themselves; he lived an enchanted life of confidence and hope. Towards evening, the nuns retired to their temporary home, Poplar-Villa, where they all knelt down, and pronounced an act of consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, thus laying the foundation stone of their new enterprise.

“Our Sisters in England,” writes Madame Flore, “are setting up their little house. No furniture, not even seats. Sister Regina, with her well-known ingenuity, has made some stools, which they carry about with them into the kitchen, refectory, etc. They praise, however, the comfort of the beds—straw mattresses, hard and raised in the centre like pin-cushions, and so narrow that they spent the first night in contriving how to balance themselves upon them.”

In a letter from Croydon we read the nuns' first impression of England: "*Here no one works on Sundays.* May God bless England for this beautiful strictness, and cause the light of His mercy to shine upon this people, so great and noble in many ways!"

The Mother-General had desired that the little community should live according to their rule, so the bell was rung for prayer, meals, and recreation, the office was said in choir, and there was spiritual reading during dinner and supper, though (as a single lay-sister had all the household work to do) it often happened that only two could sit down to table.

At first the Sisters went about their duties in the parish in secular dress—poke bonnet, shawl, etc.; Madame Flore advised them to try wearing the religious habit and veil. The effect was indescribable; troops of street boys fled at their approach, or gathered together in groups to give one another courage to stand their ground; when the Sisters appeared, they pointed at them: "The Black Devils! the Black Devils!" One day an errand boy, looking quite scared, ran up to the garden gate, threw in a parcel, and fled.

"Hi! little boy! Come! Come!" In vain;

fear, which usually deprives people of the power of motion, lent wings to his feet. It was not the boys only who were frightened. One day a group of gentlemen stopped before the door. "This is the house! Do you see that light?" (the Sanctuary lamp) "Every evening it reappears in the same place at the same hour . . . strange things must be going on there." These examples show what absurd legends, handed down from age to age, caused people in England at that time to look with suspicion on Convents; thus they continue to live on fables bequeathed by their forefathers.

The Catholics, on the other hand, loaded the Sisters with attentions, and even presents—and such presents! An ounce of sugar, a slice of cheese, a bunch of carrots or radishes, most often flowers, and all with greetings and good wishes. A young Belgian lady, a former pupil at Coloma, took up her residence at Poplar-Villa, uniting, as it were, her destiny to that of Mother Cecilia; she afterwards rendered great services to the Foundation.

The first pupil was received in August, and gradually the number increased; the Sisters were shocked at the ignorance of the children on religious subjects; one of them did not go

to Mass on Sunday, and when the nun remonstrated with her, she replied: "I would rather go on Thursdays." "Have patience," Madame Flore writes, "a little at a time; these children will find out for themselves in what they differ from Protestants; at present they know very little about it; how should they? We should all be ignorant if we were not taught."

A little later the note changes: "You would not believe how good and innocent these English girls are, and how they long after the things of God. Sacred pictures delight them. One of them could not take her eyes off a representation of Our Lord (the Sacred Heart) in the chapel. 'But, Mary,' I said, 'it is not enough to gaze, you must pray.' 'Oh! yes, Madame, but I was praying in my heart.'"

The nuns could not long remain at Poplar-Villa. It was important that Catholic education should acquire a reputation in the town, and the limited space at their disposal obliged them to restrict the number of their pupils, and this rendered them unable to afford the aid of secular teachers, which are indispensable to a new Foundation. One day, as Madame Cecilia and her companion were house-hunting, Madame Adelaïde suddenly stopped in front



CONVENT OF THE LADIES OF MARY, COLOMA, CROYDON.

(To face page 100.)

of a fine building, exclaiming: "If the good God would but give us that!"

A week had scarcely passed when Mr Lavers, the father of their first pupil, brought them word that the property was for sale. The house was built in the English manner, with a broad flight of stone steps outside, and a covered entrance on the first floor; there were some fine trees in front, and the house had the additional advantage of admitting easily of enlargement, by connecting it with one of the adjoining houses, which were exactly similar.

"Some one told me," writes Madame Flore in 1870, "that my life henceforth would be strewn with crosses; without looking upon this as a prophecy, I prepare myself to suffer." Many troubles did in fact befall her at this time.

The first blow was the death of Madame Kostka, who was doubly endeared to her on account of her amiable character and her relationship to the founder of the Institute. "Madame Kostka is failing rapidly," she sighs, "she is thin almost to the point of transparency; I could scarcely restrain my tears when I saw her, and she, too, was much moved." A little later she writes: "What a

pious and edifying invalid, she is already broken down with illness . . . yet she wanted to make her own bed, and retire at the same hour as the rest of the community. I was obliged to use my authority to prevent it: 'But I can do this quite well . . . you are too kind to me . . . I am better . . . I am recovered,' and while speaking, her voice is weak and her breathing difficult."

Again she writes: "Be patient with our dear Sister Kostka. Alas! people are not like themselves when tried by illness. Every hour, every moment, brings new desires, new caprices. As far as possible satisfy the invalid. God asks from us this condescension and charitable care." But the recommendation was superfluous; there was never a murmur, never an unreasonable desire; she said she was treated with too much consideration, she did not deserve a hundredth part of what was done for her. Her happiness increased as death approached: "My God, draw me to Thyself; come, Lord Jesus," and her face shone with an almost supernatural light, as if her soul were spreading its wings to fly away.

Another great sorrow was the invasion of

Rome by the Piedmontese. "The occupation of Rome," Madame Flore writes, "distresses me beyond all power of expression . . . nothing remains for us but to pray. But what do I say? Nothing remains! Prayer is a sovereign remedy, which can arrest this flood of evil. From morning till night, two nuns are always here in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament."

The Franco-German War, followed by the Commune, drew from her a cry of compassion: "It would need tears of blood to weep for the misfortunes of France."

Another trouble which she felt keenly, was the difficulty of bringing about a good understanding between the Sisters in England and the Bishop of Southwark. As we have said, the Bishop had only half consented to the Foundation, not that he objected to the Institute as such, but because he feared the school might injure other Convents in the diocese. Eventually he sent some one to the Sisters on his behalf, and Madame Cecilia gladly availed herself of the opportunity to explain their position, in the most straightforward manner. The Ladies of Mary were bound by their Constitutions to devote themselves primarily

to the work of education, but there was little danger of injury to other Institutions, because the terms of their school were higher than those of the neighbouring Convents. The respectful firmness with which she spoke, made a favourable impression on the Bishop's delegate, and, from this time, Bishop Grant's attitude underwent a change. His successor, Bishop Danell, who was appointed to the Diocese of Southwark in 1870, not only regarded the Sisters with benevolence, but on several occasions visited them.

Madame Cecilia was not backward in graceful reciprocity, and learning that the Bishop desired to found an Episcopal Seminary, and that funds were needed for the purpose, she presented to his lordship the proceeds of some fêtes organised at the Convent, concealing the offering under the form of a rose.

We have already mentioned the deep grief with which Madame Flore heard of the occupation of Rome ; from that time onwards Pius IX. had continued to receive protestations of the most ardent attachment to his person ; while the voice of public prayer, pilgrimages, processions, etc., recalled the ages of faith. The Ladies of Mary, being unable, as nuns,

to take part in these filial manifestations, Madame Flore sent an offering in their name to the Church of the Sacred Heart at Paray; the offering was of beautiful workmanship, and took the form of a silver heart surrounded by a crown of thorns; on one side was engraved the words: "The Institute of the Ladies of Mary to the Adorable Heart of Jesus," and a list of the names of the members of the Institute (including those of the deceased Sisters) was enclosed. Mademoiselle A. Van Wymelbeke, a niece of Canon Van Crombrugghe conveyed the offering to Paray; and there was great rejoicing at Coloma when it was known that it had reached its destination, and rested at the feet of our Lord, to plead forever the cause of His Vicar and the Holy Church. Regarded in this light, the simple act became a memorable event in the eyes of Madame Flore, and she caused it to be solemnly recorded in the Annals of the Institute.

About this time (1874) a breath of persecution swept over one of the Houses, in consequence of a refusal given to some influential families. "Courage, dear Mother," writes Madame Flore, "those who do God's work are vowed to struggles; it is the condition attached to

the good which is given them to do. Do you know what must be done in these difficulties. Accept them. Submit to them. Conquer them. Raise yourself on Calvary, and look at them from there."

While caring for the souls of her daughters, she did not forget their bodies: "Be careful to keep the Convent warm, have fires everywhere. There will always be enough sacrifices left to feed your fervour; I mean those sacrifices which consist, not in what is exterior, but in the martyrdom of the heart."

She watched over the health of the more delicate nuns with motherly solicitude, and would allow them few or no austerities. A Sister, who was exempt from the law of fasting, pleaded: "All the Saints fasted." Madame Flore interposed, "All the Saints fasted! Who pretends that? No one denies that fasting was *usually* practised by the Saints. But how many exceptions! St Theresa is one! . . . and she was a contemplative! Stay, my child, let us understand the matter. Let us leave austerities to the Carmelites and Poor Clares, as those admirable women leave it to us to work for souls. . . ."

Whenever any of the nuns were ill at the

Convents which she visited, her first inquiry was after their health, and, as soon as she had paid a short visit to the chapel, she hastened to the infirmary; she did not stay long, but was very kind and consoling; she renewed her visit every day after Mass, and if she happened to have any leisure later in the day, she spent it at the bedside of the invalids.

One of the nuns relates the following incident: "I had watched for two nights beside one of the Sisters who was dying. She begged the Mother-General as a favour to allow me to remain one night longer, saying she thought it would be her last, and that she would find it difficult to make another Sister understand. Madame Flore consented, and I sat down in an easy chair prepared to watch. Towards midnight there was a gentle knock. It was . . . the Superior-General. 'Go to bed Sister, I will take your place.'

"The illness was prolonged, contrary to anticipation, and for six consecutive nights the kind Mother came thus, secretly, at midnight, to relieve me of my duty."

The year 1875 was the sixtieth year of Madame Flore: "Thank God for me, my

dear daughter," she writes, "I have been a Christian fifty-nine years. I wish to take a step forward on the way of perfection."

This year was also memorable for the Consecration of the Church to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. "Did I tell you," writes Madame Flore, "that I have ventured to join my voice to that of several other religious Congregations, to humbly beg from Pius IX. the Consecration of the Universal Church to the Sacred Heart." Again: "By this time the Holy Father will have received our petition. Does it seem presumption, temerity on our part? But if a woman by her prayers and efforts could bring about the introduction of the Feast of the Sacred Heart into the liturgical cycle, is it forbidden to a group of women to unite their endeavours to obtain this favour?"

When the decree had been promulgated: "Rejoice, rejoice, dear children, for the triumph of the Heart of Jesus, for the homage and adoration which will be rendered to Him everywhere! Thanks to Pius IX., the date 16th June 1875 will be accounted among the most memorable of the century. Who does not look upon it as certain, that henceforth springs of grace will be poured upon humanity!

Who does not rejoice to see the prelude to a new diffusion of this most adorable devotion !”

The Festival was observed by the Institute with even greater solemnity than that of the Holy Name of Mary.¹ Full of love for the Divine Heart, Madame Flore gave her orders, and all the superiors and mistresses vied with each other to carry out her wishes.

At no period had the Institute lost so many nuns by death as at this time. The first was the young Sister Augusta, of whom we have spoken. “All is over,” writes Madame Flore ; “our dear Sister Augusta is in Heaven. I have just been to the room where she breathed her last, and where I recited the prayers for the dying. . . .

“Now she is there on the bed draped in white. Three candles burn before her, a Symbolical Trinity that made me think of our holy vows.” A few days later :

“O my God, how quickly we leave this world ! Four hours sufficed to take away our Sister Augusta. But what a happy death ! She never ceased to pray, and ask for prayers.

¹ The Feast of the Holy Name of Mary was celebrated at Coloma for the first time in 1874. Madame Flore had composed a Hymn for the Festival.

Night and day, the thought of her returns to me. I see her in her bed, surrounded with our tears and prayers. How happy it is to believe that our separation is only for a time, and that we shall see our Sisters again in Heaven! Sister Augusta must be there. I never knew anyone so free from bitterness—hatred and enmity were unknown to her.”

No less beautiful was the death of Sister Angelica, another gentle young nun who was ill at the same time. “I did not think she would be the first to go. Now it is my turn,” she remarked simply, when she heard of Sister Augusta’s death; she looked upon death as an event which, without interrupting her life, would set her free from earthly bonds, and put her in possession of liberty, power, and happiness. Recalling her admission to the Convent, she took Madame Flore’s hand affectionately, saying: “How kind you were to receive me in spite of my bad health!” “It was God Who was kind, my child,” said the Mother-General deeply moved. “Oh! yes, very kind!” She paused a moment, and went on: “And after so many infidelities on my part!—how great is the mercy of God! . . .”

Madame Flore was the more grieved at

these premature deaths, because she could not supply the places of the Sisters. "I do not know if you cherish the hope of having someone at Easter," she writes to a young Superior. "Understand it is impossible. Not only has death taken two of our Sisters from us, but we have our invalids. I can only say *fiat* to every one, on all sides. It is this unhealthy season that has brought these troubles upon us—with the permission of God, be it well understood." Then she spurs her on: "Courage, my dear daughter, act like the good peasant in the story told at our last Retreat; he rejoiced at everything that happened, seeing in it the good pleasure of God. 'Do you mean you would rejoice if the hail fell on your crops?' 'Certainly, the good God could turn it into gold.' Courage, then—imitate David before the ark—sing your sorrow."

"Sing your sorrow," the advice was opportune to Madame Flore herself at this moment. For nearly seven years the house at Croydon had remained free from sickness, but, in 1876, four of the Sisters were struck down by fever. Madame Flore's anxiety was great; every letter from England she carried to the chapel, and opened it there, at the feet of Jesus. The

two Sisters first attacked were on the way to recovery, when Madame Cecilia fell ill. "Alas!" sighed Madame Flore, "this is what I feared! What can I do! May this last misfortune, like the others, find me submissive to the Divine Will. Let us love and bless this adorable will, whatever betide. God is a Father. He understands His work. He can cure them. He will. I repeat this a hundred times a day, and a hundred times I begin again to tremble."

Yet she wrote cheerfully to Madame Adelaïde, on whom the weight of responsibility fell. Every day news of the invalids was sent from England, while the Belgian mail carried back words of encouragement :

"Courage, my child, every one has his turn ; the bell of St-Rombaut has sounded nothing but knells this last week. The trial is great, but God fills us with strength . . . I do not know to what extent the invalids can pray. Let them not do too much—no long prayers. Nothing is so meritorious as suffering borne in union with Jesus Christ."

One day there was no letter. More than twenty times that day, Madame Flore went down to the Portress's office: "No news,

Sister?" "No, Rev. Mother." "Oh! a bad sign, I fear the worst, they would not have failed to write if they had been better. Please God a letter may come for me," and the poor Mother went up to the chapel. Hours passed thus; at the slightest unaccustomed sound, at every step in the corridor, a ray of hope came to her. . . . The night was passed in sad thought, and when she appeared in the refectory in the morning, every one noticed her pallor. Towards evening the Sister Portress came in alarm with a telegram. Madame Flore seized it, and waited a moment, her fingers could scarcely open it. She read: "Doctor just left, quite out of danger." What joy! She came to the community-room holding up the telegram in triumph, while the tears fell from her eyes. "Out of danger! Out of danger! What a mercy, my God!"—A letter and two cards followed the telegram. Madame Flore replied: "Ah! my very dear convalescents, what news! How I bless you! How I congratulate you! How I reproach myself with having mistrusted God for a moment. . . ." She writes further: "We are afraid our invalids are not taking sufficient nourishment. Consult the doctor about this.

My special blessing to Madame Cecilia and Sister Regina, not forgetting those who are well, and so courageous and fervent."

At last the Sisters were allowed to leave their room. "God be blessed, my dear daughters," she writes, "you are given back to us. Tell Mother Cecilia to keep quiet. The chief and only observance in sickness is to surrender oneself to Divine Providence. Let her surrender herself, then. When we are well we work and act, when we are ill we play the sluggard."

During this same year (1876) Madame Flore was present at the departure of a young novice, whose health did not permit her to remain. She was not quite nineteen, and could not make up her mind to return to the world: "Oh! you will write to me, will you not?" she begged in heartrending tones, addressing now Madame Flore, now the Novice-mistress, now one or other of the Sisters, and bringing tears to their eyes, "You are so happy, you who are not obliged to go away. How grieved I am to leave you." "And we, too, Sister shall miss you from the novitiate." "Ah! keep me . . . wait a little . . . I shall get better . . . I will do everything that I am ordered to do."

Madame Flore was very sad ; she had known this girl since she came as a child to the school at Mouscron, and had attached herself to her as to one singularly innocent and pure. She had watched over her mental development, and her frail health, and, each time she came to Mouscron, she had the happiness of seeing the result of her care ; and now that she had reached the threshold of the religious life, and (to use the girl's own expression) was "living trustful and joyous, like a bird singing in the cage of the Lord," all these hopes were crushed. Madame Flore felt that the parting would be forever in this life. A few months after the death of the young girl, she wrote : "Poor dear child ! I have just been reading the Gospel about Jairus' daughter raised to life. Ah ! If Jesus were still there, how eagerly I would go to seek Him, and beseech Him to give her back to us, but Heaven no longer surrenders its conquests. She might have worked with us for a long time, have become an excellent religious, and done much good—it would have been for us to go away. Alas ! it is the angels that God takes from us."

"I have had two affections in my life,"

Madame Flore once said, "for children and for the aged, two extremes which touch one another, and which touch me." Some of these children occupied a large place in her life as she advanced in years.

One evening, in 1871, a gentleman wearing the Victoria Cross appeared at Coloma, bringing his five little children—four girls and a boy, to be educated there, for, in his ignorance of the Rules of the Institute, he imagined the boy could be educated with his sisters. Madame Flore's refusal filled him with consternation, and the little girls put their hands together, and pleaded pathetically: "If you please, Madame . . . take him too . . . he is so little." Madame Flore was touched, and happily the chaplain, Canon Stevens, came to her aid, offering to receive the little boy, until a school could be found for him in the town. These children had been born in different parts of the world; Nellie, the eldest, in Ceylon, the second in India, the third in London, the little boy at the Cape, and the youngest, Blanche, who became Madame Flore's favourite, in mid-ocean. All the girls were Protestants, but the boy was a Catholic like his father; the conditional baptism of these

children presented little difficulty, their mother having died too early to have taught them anything contrary to the Catholic faith. The discipline of the school was somewhat relaxed in favour of Blanche, who was allowed, as a reward for good conduct, to run to Madame Flore in her work-room. Here she would flit about, like a bird set free from its cage, looking at everything, while her kind friend would continue her correspondence, sometimes looking up to smile at the child, to admire a butterfly that had been caught, a silk-worm, or a dried flower. Although Blanche could not at first understand a word of French, Madame Flore would hold long conversations with her, by means of gestures, and the few English words that she knew.

Another child, to whom she was greatly attached, was Marie, the daughter of a former pupil, who had fallen into great misfortunes through no fault of her own. Madame Flore took the little girl to educate, and she remained at Coloma for eight years; and, by a providential coincidence, was only removed at the time when her benefactress was struck down by illness, and unable to watch over her. The following letter was written by

her mother when she received her back from Coloma :

“It is indeed true, Marie, your child, your little adopted one, has come back to me for good. With a feeling of deep reverence, I receive this dear and precious deposit from your hands. While expressing my loving gratitude, I feel that I ought to assure you that mother and child, united in heart, shall always be worthy of you.

“My life hitherto has been but one long Way of the Cross, and now, through you, I receive from God the sweet mission of completing your holy work. Oh! how I will strive to become worthy of my sacred task! Yes, for Marie’s sake, for your sake who have given me everything, in overwhelming me with favours in my daughter, I will change my tastes, give up my manner of living, assume other habits, follow a rule of life. I mean, I will impose calm on my mind, gravity on my behaviour, ardent and practical piety on my actions. Marie’s resolutions shall become mine.

“Thank you again for that blessed day in the past, when, in the hour of trial, you sheltered this child, whom the faults of a

senseless father had doomed to suffering. Thank you again, thank you hourly, thank you always, most dear Mother, for the sweet past given to Marie, which is now over. To-day this dear and beautiful soul which, unfolded to all that is good under your eye, enters life in the world. On the threshold of this new career, which my tenderness shall make smooth for her, it is a Christian mother who receives her."

VIII

SUPERIOR-GENERAL. THIRD TERM OF OFFICE,
1876-1885

ONE consolation was reserved to Madame Flore at the close of this sorrowful year (1876), the meeting of the General Chapter. It met for the second time since she became Mother-General, and the eighth since the foundation of the Institute.

She was overjoyed at the prospect of meeting her Sisters again : " Come, do come," she writes to one who was detained by alterations which were being made in the chapel ; " at the time of the Chapter I always think of the Jews at the Feast of Tabernacles. You know God promised that no harm should happen to them during their absence."

On the appointed day, travellers arrived from all the houses, and the English Sisters, recently so sorely tried, received a special welcome.

As we have said, in these later years Madame Flore rarely lifts the veil of her spiritual life, so that we are obliged to leave in shadow what a few words from her journal would have made clear. Thus, on the eve of the Chapter, as she was walking in the garden, she suddenly stopped in front of a statue of Our Lady, and exclaimed: "O Mary, I will do it for your sake!" Her daughters looked at her in surprise. "Yes," she continued, "I have this morning pronounced a *fiat* which cost me much." May we not believe that this *fiat* referred to the renewal of her term of office; she was free to accept, or decline—and she accepted.

By the terms of the Constitutions the aim of the General Council is to consult together as to the means of increasing the sanctification of the members of the Institute. Reminding the Ladies Capitular of the greatness of this aim, Madame Flore exhorted them to have recourse to the Holy Spirit. "Scarcely had the Holy Ghost descended on the Apostles, than behold them new men! given to prayer and contemplation, despising trials, despising their own lives, seeking after spiritual good. May this Divine ray shine also upon our

souls, and may our whole being assume a new life." One question that she wished to bring before them was the tendency to multiply practices of devotion. The Chapter advised that such only should be admitted as were plainly recommended by the Church:—Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to Mary and Joseph, and to the Holy Angels.

Mgr. Lauwers, who had presided over the Chapter, closed it with an exhortation on the happiness of the religious life—real, deep happiness, notwithstanding the shadows which are met with in every condition of life, and which serve to detach us from all that is not God. This thought of the emptiness of earthly things became predominate with Madame Flore: "Our misfortunes have been great this year," she observed one day, "the loss of our dear Sisters, money losses; let us be resigned to everything; these last are nothing; if our poverty is real, so much the better! Yes, for nuns it is better than abundance of possessions. Happy the indigent!"

And as Madame Marcelline, the Econome, exclaimed against this language, which touched

her department. "Yes, indeed," replied Madame Flore, half in jest, half in earnest, "I do not see how it can be otherwise. Let us be faithful stewards, yes—but tenacious stewards! Money! it is well described in the Gospel—booty for thieves, rust! Ask Ananias, unhappy man, if he found it a good thing to keep money!" and she accompanied her words with expressive gestures.

Here we may recall some friendly passages at arms between Madame Flore and this Sister, who held the office of Econome during the whole time of her Generalate, and whose wisdom and prudence she always admired—but not always her liberality.

The Superior-General, as well as the humblest of her daughters, must apply to the Econome for the money needed for her expenses; and Madame Flore did this with childlike simplicity. But her charity was great, and nearly all she had was spent in good works; then followed a series of applications to Madame Marcelline. At the first, the Sister sighed, and gave; at the second, she gave also, but grumbled; at the third, a storm burst: "It is ruinous; I will no longer take charge of the money." "Very well,"

said Madame Flore, "I will take charge of it." "What do you say?" "I say," said Madame Flore, accenting every word, "that . . . I . . . will . . . take . . . charge . . . of . . . it." It was the finishing stroke; the Sister who dreaded nothing so much as this disastrous interference, disappeared for a moment, and returned with the required sum.

Another time: "See, Sister," said Madame Flore, handing her one of those charitable appeals that arrived daily, "here is a good investment." Madame Marcelline raised her head uneasily, "A good investment?" "Yes, an outlay in charity, the profit exceeds the loss." The Sister shrugged her shoulders: "And who will feed *you* when your bread fails? who will pay your expenses? who will clothe you?" "Our friends, of course." "Friends!" and the Sister made a gesture of contempt, "where have you ever found that people who are ruined have friends? Do it, however, since you are made of money. As for me, I will retire, and have nothing more to do with it." Upon this Madame Flore suddenly changed her tactics, "Very well, Sister," she said, with an air of profound resignation, "We will not give anything

away." "How? not give anything away?" "But is it not what you wished?" "Who? I? have I ever said that? It would be a fine thing, indeed, for nuns to be without compassion." "And our expenses?" objected Madame Flore, pitilessly reproducing her opponent's arguments. "Do not prevent almsgiving." Thus it ended in the Econome pleading for the good work, and Madame Flore offering objections.

Many instances might be given of Madame Flore's generosity. A nun had long been suffering from a most painful disease, and it was suggested that an operation should be performed. "An operation!" exclaimed the nun, "but it is so expensive!" "And what is money?" interrupted Madame Flore quickly, "when it is a question of relieving the sufferings of a Sister; if it will only bring you a few nights' sleep, I will thank God upon my knees."

One of her former pupils had greatly desired to be a nun, and awaited only her father's consent, when an accidental meeting changed the current of her thoughts, and she married. From this time a series of troubles broke over her—health, fortune, and, last of all, her husband's

love forsook her, and, at the age of twenty-eight, she was left in a state of desolation. Madame Flore's thoughtful care never failed her; she sent her clothing, linen, money, often resorting to strategy to spare the lady's feelings. Once she sent her anonymously one hundred francs; after a few moments of surprise, the lady guessed who was her benefactor, and hastened to Coloma. "My child," said Madame Flore, "did the lady who sent you this, give her name?" "No." "Is it necessary for you to know her name in order to enjoy the benefit?" "No." "Then let us respect the incognito of Providence."

Here is another instance. On returning to Coloma after a journey to England, Madame Flore noticed that one of the novices looked sad. "Sister," she said kindly, "you have some trouble?" "I, Rev. Mother, oh! no." "Yes, my child, you have some trouble, there is no use concealing it. Come, tell me what it is that grieves you." The novice bent her head. "Well . . . Yes . . . I am sad. I keep thinking of my brother's future?" "The brother who was to pass his examinations?" "Yes." "Has he failed?" "On the contrary, he has passed with honours"—then forcing

back her tears, she went on ; “it makes it all the harder for him to be compelled to give up the career he was looking forward to.” “How give it up?” “He has drawn a bad number.¹ This would not have mattered, but for the losses our parents suffered last year ; it will be impossible to pay for a substitute. They might, indeed, do it by dint of great privations, but neither my brother nor I could consent to their leading such a hard and restricted life.” Madame Flore had listened in silence ; she was reflecting. “Perhaps it could be managed in some way, how much is required?” “Eighteen hundred francs.” “It is a great deal. But see how kind is Providence ! Six hundred francs have just been sent to me ; some one gave it to me yesterday, saying that I should spend it with discrimination, whereas he would spend it at random. I offer you this money. Evidently Providence intended it for you. Soon, perhaps, I may be able to add my own donation, and . . . as for the rest . . . we will see . . . we will consider it.” The novice was struck dumb. “But, Madame,” she began at last colouring deeply, “my parents will never consent. . . .” “Never

¹ For the Conscription.

consent to what?" "To your depriving yourself in this way for us." "I depriving myself! Say rather, it is they who are depriving themselves in allowing you to follow your vocation. Let me explain. They have given their daughter, I give them back their son—so we are free from debt to one another. Come, sit down, we are going to settle this,"—and, without moving from her seat, Madame Flore, radiant with joy, dictated a few well-chosen lines, which restored peace and happiness to the young girl's home.

The 7th February 1878 was a day of mourning for the Church—Pius IX. had died. As soon as the news reached Coloma, Madame Flore assembled everybody in and around the Convent—nuns, pupils, workmen—to make the Stations of the Cross, and pray for the soul of the late Pope. Then she sent a circular letter to all the Convents: "It is only too true, my dear daughters, that Pius IX. is in Heaven. He has left this earth, and our love could not hold him back. With what admiration ought we to look upon this great Pontiff, whose life has been marked by so many memorable deeds. We ourselves owe him a special debt of gratitude; he has praised our

Institute, and given it his recommendation ; he has blessed it tenderly many times. May his name, which has been upon our lips during the third part of a century, still remain there every day at Holy Mass until the end of our lives."

While praying for Pius IX., Madame Flore could not forget the future Pope. For nine days the members of the Institute daily recited the *Veni Creator*, and heard Mass for the intentions of the Conclave. On the eve of the election, Madame Flore was frequently heard to ejaculate : " Spirit of Counsel and of Light, guide the Church ! "

" Nine o'clock," she writes, " the hour of Tierce, the hour on which the Holy Ghost descended on the Apostles, and which the Church has especially consecrated to prayer—probably at this very hour the Cardinals will proceed to the election. May God's will be declared and accomplished. May the Holy Spirit make the election His own work." When it became known that Cardinal Pecci had been chosen, she writes : " Your English newspapers join in the chorus with us ; they cannot say enough in favour of the new Pontiff."

The Brief of Eulogy had required certain changes in the Rules ; thus amended, they were

to be tried for fifteen years longer, when a further application was to be made. This time there was little delay; Madame Flore's request was made on the 19th March 1878, and granted in the following July.

The news of the Papal Approval became known to the outside world. Madame Flore writes: "*Le Bien Public* [a Belgian paper] said yesterday that the Cardinal had gone to Rome on the matter of our Constitutions. I do not know who sent the announcement, which is neither favourable nor the reverse." Soon a Liberal paper published an article distinctly unfavourable. It was not without good reason, it said, that the Cardinal had undertaken to be the advocate of the Ladies of Mary; the struggle on the Education question was imminent; funds were needed; thanks to the grateful liberality of the nuns, the Cardinal would be able to throw a powerful argument into the scale. All this would not have troubled Madame Flore, but for the attack on the Cardinal: "The romances of the *Etoile* cannot harm us," she writes, "but I am sorry they should make us a pretext for unworthy insinuations."

Again: "It can no longer be said, my dear

daughters, that we are unknown, the press is full of us ; it is said that we are orthodox, and devoted to the Holy See—two truths, my good sirs ! Let us leave the newspapers alone, it will be better. They throw over our littleness a mantle of persecution, which makes us look greater by a hundred cubits.”

Cardinal Dechamp also gave no other reply than silence. “The inventions of the *Etoile* are stupid,” he writes ; “they are fables that need trouble no one ; no one will believe them.”

In May 1878, Madame Flore began her annual visits to the Convents, accompanied by Madame Clementine, who thus describes the journey. “A cloudless sky, and a fresh breeze bringing sweet scents through the open window, a procession defiling in the distance just as our train draws up at a station. It is a Rogation Procession, a very simple one . . . the Cross, a few banners carried by young girls, the parish priest, the beadle, and some Altar-boys chanting the Litany of the Saints ; the priest, according to custom, throws holy water hither and thither upon the fields, while the peasants, bending over their furrows devoutly cross themselves. As we watched them Madame Flore said : ‘I should like to take part in the procession ; it is

beautiful to see the good peasants honouring God in this way. How trustfully they act towards Him'—then she added, in the tone of tender pity with which she always spoke of working people: 'They know He was one of themselves.' 'Yes,' I answered, 'a working-man, the son of an artisan.' 'And assuredly one who was not ashamed to live by the labour of his hands—it must be owned,' she continued, 'the Church has the art of making herself understood by the people. How can it be otherwise with such simple rites! The Rogation Processions must enable the least imaginative among them to grasp the idea of God.' It happened that a white-haired peasant was in the same compartment, and he smiled, and began to tell Madame Flore how, when he was a young man, he would not for an empire have missed one of these processions, or hearing the name of his patron Saint invoked in the Litany; how his companions laughed at him, but he used to answer: 'Gently . . . it is from God that we receive our daily bread . . . if you do not know that, you need not pretend to be learned, you know nothing.' "

Madame Flore loved to talk to working people about things that interested them—



COLOMA—THE RUINS IN THE GROUNDS.

[To face page 108.



their poultry-yard, their cottage, their little children, the prospects of the harvest, and she often found the conversations only too short.

The School Fête, 2nd August 1878, was honoured by the presence of the Nuncio Mgr. Vannutelli.¹ "The Fête yesterday was very beautiful," writes Madame Flore, "His Excellency said Mass here, and, after breakfast, he saw the community and the pupils; he went round the garden, and admired the ruins. . . ." The Nuncio was a kind, benevolent man, who soon won the hearts of the children, and was always welcomed with enthusiasm. Once having been detained at Coloma by an accident to his carriage, he took the opportunity of going round the park. The children, hearing of it, ran and placed themselves at a point where he would pass, and, when he came in sight, waved their handkerchiefs, crying: "Vive! Monseigneur!" The future Cardinal laughed heartily, then, suddenly becoming grave, he said: "It is innocence protesting against the imputations of the *Etoile*. I ask myself what the future has in store for me."

What the future had in store for him was the withdrawal of the Belgian Nunciature after

¹ Nuncio in Belgium from 1876-1880.

the deplorable Education Law (Loi Scolaire) passed by the Chambers in 1879, of which the aim was to dechristianise primary schools. "My God, whither are we drifting!" exclaimed Madame Flore; "it is a time to lament with the prophet Joel: 'Spare, O Lord, spare thy people.' . . . Schools without God! Tell me, my dear daughter, do not those two words cry out at being joined together. Schools without God! That is to say, without a Father, without restraint, without incentive! . . . An English lady wrote yesterday, saying that her countrymen pitied the Belgians; everyone there is agreed that children should be brought up in a way that will not make them dreadful little unbelievers." Again: "What a pity that such a fine nation, eminent for practical sense, should not make a better use of it. Even the ancients taught veneration for the gods. I was struck this morning as I was giving my lesson in literature, by a passage in Horace, which I could not help applying to the present situation: 'Religion alone can give purity to youth, dignity to age, and honour to one's country.'"

The bishops were not backward in pointing out the dangers of this law, and the newspapers

engaged in a heated controversy. "Yes, my dear daughter," writes Madame Flore, "the struggle between the two parties is of unexampled warmth. It was time for the bishops to intervene. Many will think their words too energetic, and would have preferred silence. . . . For our part, we are delighted with this frank and powerful instruction. We are no longer in the age of the Catacombs." The persecution fell most heavily upon the clergy, who had boldly undertaken a combined struggle against the official system of education, opposing it by schools in which religious belief could be safeguarded.

The leader of the Ministry, being unable to obtain from the Vatican a disavowal of the action of the bishops, abruptly suppressed the Belgian legation with the Holy See. Mgr. Vannutelli had promised to preside at the distribution of prizes at Coloma; he wrote to excuse himself: "Just at the time of receiving your very kind letter, I was informed of my approaching departure. This is to tell you I must give up all Presidency of your Fête, to my great regret I admit, when it is a question of Coloma. Notwithstanding the threats made in the chamber, I did not expect such prompt

measures. It is a violent reprisal for the action of the bishops. Pray for me, and for poor Belgium, and accept the assurance of my entire and religious devotion in the Lord.

“A. J. VANNUTELLI.”

Madame Flore was deeply moved, and at once wrote in reply :

“A deplorable and persecuting policy has just dealt a blow at us. As Belgians we are humiliated, as nuns, and (if I may dare to say so) as friends of your Excellency, we are deeply distressed. All Belgium knows, my lord, the spirit of the measure that has been directed against you ; the motives that have dictated it, and the consequences that will follow. As for us, if we were struck down by it, your firm and dignified attitude in face of the injury which has just been done you would raise us up. Your Excellency is now numbered among the illustrious ones persecuted for justice’ sake. In our filial affection we may grieve, but not in our faith. Deign to bless us, my lord, and to accept our sorrowful and grateful homage. Our kind wishes and remembrances will accompany you everywhere, and we will not cease to pray God to fill you with His serenity and love. . . .”

In answer Mgr. Vannutelli wrote: "Notwithstanding the confusion and trouble around me just now, I cannot leave your kind letter of yesterday unanswered. Let us count upon a Catholic reaction. Above all, let us count upon the Divine mercy, which surpasses all our expectations. God will re-make Belgium.

"I need not tell you how much your religious words console me, and how greatly I value your prayers. I had hoped to pay you a visit, but it is impossible. I leave this evening for Rome. I will ask a special blessing for you all from the Holy Father. I shall always retain the best remembrance of the Institute of the Ladies of Mary, whose excellent spirit I have admired on every occasion."

Like other countries on the Continent, Belgium had seen the rights and existence of its religious orders threatened, and, on this account, Madame Flore felt that it would be well to found a second Convent in England, where there seemed a prospect of greater stability. She opened a correspondence with the Bishop of Middlesborough. Before giving his consent, Dr Lacy desired to know something of the Institute. Madame Flore drew up a statement, written rapidly, almost without

laying down her pen, in which she unfolded the plan of their organisation, its resources, and the means at her disposal for carrying out the enterprise. In conclusion, she assured the Bishop that she asked only his approval, and had no thought of burdening the diocese with any new expense. This document, supported by the recommendation of Cardinal Dechamp, satisfied the Bishop, who graciously signified his consent.

For three months, however, the project was delayed, owing to the difficulty of finding nuns for the new Foundation, several having recently been removed by death. Madame Flore has been blamed for excessive caution, but this was quite foreign to her character : "I knock at every door," she sighs, "and no one opens to me. Instead of giving me nuns, the good God takes them away from me. If He would deign to multiply our number tenfold, no interest should be left on sufferance, and Madame Cecilia's missionary fever could be satisfied." To another she writes : "It is easy, my child, to formulate *desiderata* ; draw me out of my present powerless position, and I will go forward."

Madame Cecilia would not admit herself vanquished. She thought Croydon could

spare two nuns, who would form the nucleus of the undertaking, the rest could be decided upon later ; there was always the resource of secular mistresses to fall back upon. In a word, she asked for nothing, would carry nothing with her ; like the Apostles, she would go without human help, without money, or provisions ; privation had never been a hardship to her ; “ But, for the love of God,” she pleaded, “ let us make haste.”

She and Madame Raphael vied with one another in generosity ; the one gave a tithe of her nuns at Croydon, the other stripped Coloma of furniture and household requisites ; in short, what had seemed impossible an hour before, became a thing accomplished. Madame Flore and Madame Raphael then set out for England. No sooner had they reached Croydon, than Madame Cecilia began to prepare secular clothing for the journey, for in those days all the preliminary steps were taken incognito. Madame Flore submitted patiently to be disguised, turning now and then to see the effect of her worldly attire. When all were ready : “ Come,” she said merrily, “ we only want powder and a chignon ” ; then passing in a moment from

gay to grave, she added, with deep emotion :
“And now, all for the greater glory of God.”
Mothers Raphael and Cecilia also substituted borrowed clothing for their religious habit, and looked very well in their English cloaks, bonnets, and veils like widows “in the first days of mourning.” An English gentleman who was going to Scarborough, offered his services, saying he esteemed himself “only too happy to escort nuns.”

Madame Flore greatly admired the scenery they passed through. “This part of the country is beautiful,” she said, “at first, meadows which are seas of verdure bounded by hedges ; then deep gorges, and bare plateaux with strange fantastic, almost sinister ravines. How frightened Madame M—— would have been ! In some places the ground is covered with heath of many colours, rising in an amphitheatre ; there are some very pretty kinds of heath that I should like to see at Coloma—red, violet, and a shade of blue . . . here and there on the gently sloping pastures are flocks of sheep. What a picture ! What beautiful subjects our mistresses of drawing and painting would find here ! What a pity that I am the only one to see it, and that I cannot sketch !”

She was delighted with Oliver's Mount, which rises above Scarborough.

"I have just now before me Oliver's Mount, gleaming in the sunrise . . . the base is purple, with a flood of gold on the summit. If earth is so beautiful, what must Heaven be!"

The Sisters passed the night at an hotel, and went next morning to see the Reverend Provost Walker, who greeted them most kindly. "Monsieur le Prévôt," said Madame Flore, her voice trembling with emotion, "I confide my daughters to you, be a Father and Protector to them." "Madame," replied the priest, "your recommendation coincides with my duty. I will not fail in it; from this time my help and my prayers are yours." After this, they went to the house he had offered them as a temporary abode—an old building, destitute of comfort, and inconveniently arranged. What did it matter! Eager to begin their work, they were not to be deterred by the greater or less degree of comfort of the house. Desiring that the new Foundation should be dedicated to Our Lady, Madame Flore had brought from Belgium a small statuette with a dedicatory inscription; this

she placed, with simple improvised rites, in an old piece of furniture in the house. Returning to the hotel, she found a bunch of flowers in their room; taking it out of the vase, she presented it to Mother Cecilia, addressing her for the first time by her new title. Then she writes to the nuns at Coloma: "I have great pleasure in telling you that last Saturday, under the auspices of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, we came to an arrangement with the good Provost Walker. We are founding a new house at Scarborough, a pretty town in Yorkshire, in the midst of mountains, and close to the sea. The air is very healthy; there is every possible facility for procuring necessities, and even superfluities. In addition to these material advantages, the Sisters will have the inestimable privilege of having a Catholic Church near at hand, which they can attend in their religious habits. They will have the Blessed Sacrament in the Convent as soon as it can be arranged."

On receiving this letter, more than forty of the community, of every age and position, declared themselves ready to join the new Foundation. The novices added their special congratulations: "The sons of Sobieski said:



Copyright with permission of]

CHAPEL OF THE CONVENT AT SCARBOROUGH.

[T. Taylor & Son, Scarborough.

]To face page 208



‘Our hearts, our arms, our lives are for our country!’ As for us, we say, ‘Our hearts, our arms, our feeble talents are for the country of our soul—our dear Institute!’”

The following is the official letter in which the Bishop authorised the establishment of the Convent :—

“I hereby give you the right to establish a house of your Order, Ladies of Mary, at Scarborough in my diocese, after the very satisfactory arrangements made with the Rev. Provost H. Walker. I pray God, the Author of all good, to bless and prosper your undertaking, and to cause it to be fruitful in many good works for His glory and the salvation of souls. May the Divine Heart grant you His choicest graces.

“*Signed.* ✠ RICHARD,
“*Bishop of Middlesborough.*”

The Bishop was not content with expressing his approval, but did everything in his power for the Sisters. He had told them that he hoped their presence would contribute to restore to Catholics the good opinion of their fellow-townsmen ; five years later, he tells them that this hope had been fulfilled : “Your work has contributed to reinstate the Catholics of

my diocese in the esteem and consideration from which they had fallen. I bless you for this. Formerly, Scarborough was a thorn in my heart ; to-day it is a flower of hope."

The Convent was opened, 20th June 1882. "We have just been to Mass and Holy Communion at the Catholic Church," one of the nuns writes. "This fills us with courage for our enterprise . . . friendly faces surround us, and little presents abound." On the other hand, spiritual advantages did not abound ; after the first day there was no Mass, and Holy Communion was given as late as nine o'clock ; the Provost was absent through ill-health, and the Church, being served by visitor-priests, the hours of the services were frequently changed, and in the course of five weeks the nuns had five different Confessors.

All this would have been nothing, but for the privation of the Blessed Sacrament. The Provost, who had applied for permission from Rome, had not the heart to tell Madame Cecilia that it had been refused, but sent a message to her by another Sister. He had received a formal letter to the effect, that the Sacred Congregation, for reasons that had been well weighed and discussed, only authorise

the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament in Convents where the community numbers eight members—in this case there were only five.

To complain is unworthy of a Christian. The Sisters bravely accepted the sacrifice, and continued to attend Mass at the Parish Church. To do this they had to cross some clay soil, which in bad weather was extremely slippery. One of the Sisters thus describes the scene :

“Nuns and pupils formed a chain ; and Sister P——, leading the way, towed us all across ; sometimes one or other of us sank in the mud, the chain broke, and the file in the rear were doomed to fall together, with picturesque effect.” At church, all eyes were turned upon them ; never before within living memory had a nun been seen at Scarborough, and the faces framed in white linen, the habits, veils, and long rosaries caused the people to gaze at them as if they were Saints in their niches. “What was the most beautiful thing you saw in the church ?” a nun asked a little boy, who shyly approached to touch her habit and rosary. “Oh ! the nuns in their blue veils !” he answered, with a gesture of admiration. They found that, as a rule, the English people had a high opinion of nuns. Once, when

Madame Flore was crossing from Anvers to Harwich, a lady looked at her for a long time, with respectful interest. At last, overcoming her shyness, she approached, and addressed her in thoughtful, almost solemn tones, and in fairly good French: "Madame, is it true that you live in a state of perfection?"

"Yes, it is true, Madame."

"Then do you admit that your nuns can sin?"

"Certainly, since they are human."

"And the Superior? Yourself?"

"I also can sin," said Madame Flore.

"What do you do to reinstate yourself before God, when you have sinned?"

"We have recourse to the Sacrament of Penance—to Confession."

"Ah! Confession! Do you know that a great deal of evil is spoken of Catholic Confession?"

"Those who speak evil of it do not know it."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Could you tell me how you practise it?"

"Certainly. Have you ever visited Catholic churches?"

"Yes."

"Then you have noticed those little wooden constructions placed against the wall on the sides of the church."

"Yes, I have noticed them."

"We call those Confessionals. On certain days our priests sit there as on a tribunal, and we go there to confess our faults, kneeling down before them."

"Oh! that is very humble! We Protestants could never make up our minds to abase ourselves in that way. . . ."

The Foundation at Scarborough was severely tried at the beginning. The house was in a pitiable condition; in some places rain and snow came in at the roof; the nuns often awoke numb with cold. Madame Cecilia, though anxious about the health of her daughters, was striving to bear everything patiently, when she herself met with a serious injury to her leg. Out of regard for Madame Flore's age and feeble health, the Sisters made light of the accident in writing to her, but she was very anxious notwithstanding: "I am constantly thinking of Madame Cecilia," she writes; "I fear they are keeping the truth from me."

Other troubles gathered round her: "If I am free from bodily pain," she writes to one of the Sisters, "it is not so with the spirit. I feel very sad, and cannot shake off this depression. Prayer is burdensome, and my occupations weigh me down. It is a relief to tell one's troubles, and this is why I confide them to you; but understand well, I do not complain. Our Lord is always too kind to His children, and I should be very ungrateful if I murmured. Besides, we are Christians, and it is not our destiny to walk along flowery paths. In a while the joys of Paradise! How little then shall we remember the troubles and sorrows here below!"

The 19th March 1884 was a double Jubilee; it was the fiftieth anniversary of Madame Flore's profession, and the twenty-fifth of her Generalate. If only she might have celebrated it quietly, it would have excited in her nothing but feelings of joy. Thus she writes: "In going over in my mind all that Our Lord has done for me, I cannot keep back my tears. Please thank Him for me. Your prayers, and all those that are kindly said for me at this time, can never acquit me of my debt of gratitude. It would even need miracles of mercy to

obtain pardon of my faults during this long half century."

On the day of the Fête, it was touching to see her enter the chapel, with all the gentle gravity of a nun, her face bathed in tears.

The majesty of age is so venerable when joined to a life of duty faithfully performed ; but here there was more than ordinary moral beauty ; it was, so to speak, the personification of the triple vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience, practised with fidelity under every trial for fifty years. The *Magnificat* was sung, then the Mass began ; after the Consecration, the priest turned towards the people, holding the Sacred Host in his hand, and Madame Flore renewed the vow she had made on the same day, almost at the same hour, fifty years ago. At the close of the Mass a *Te Deum* was sung, and then the nuns offered their gifts and congratulations. At first the Mother-General could not speak a word, but gradually she regained her self-possession. "For my part," she said, "I protest I am more and more fond of the Convent ; I have found there more and better things than I had expected. May I obtain at least the completion of my wishes—the beauty of Paradise !" And as

one of her daughters exclaimed against this : "Oh ! when we count above sixty," she said joyously, "we are not far from the end. This thought is not a sad one. It is only to die unprepared that is sad, and to die unprepared is scarcely possible in the Convent."

The Fête of the Community was followed by that of the old pupils, more than six hundred of whom had accepted the invitation ; many of them had not been to Coloma since they left school.

After dinner, Madame Flore appeared among her guests, her face beaming with pleasure : "Now, my dear children," she said, "I have something I want to tell you frankly. A little while ago, I said, as innocently as possible, in community : 'It will soon be fifty years since I was professed,' and behold deputations ! telegrams ! congratulatory verses ! and all these from nuns ! I thought my honours were over, when the old pupils appeared. It is a case of saying with the *Imitation* : 'I have often reproached myself for having spoken, never for having kept silence.' I said the word, I must submit to the only too amiable consequences. On one side only, I offer no remonstrance—my affection for

you — on this subject you can never say too much, never enough. Be well assured the door of Coloma will always be open to receive you."

Every post brought an avalanche of letters ; she tried to answer them all, an occupation which lasted two months. To one she wrote : "It is a very flattering portrait you have drawn of your old Mother ; but take care, my dear daughter, man easily deceives himself. If I ended by believing there was some truth in what you say, I might become capable of any degree of folly. There is a very different portrait which it is sweet to contemplate . . . prostrate yourself before that image, strive to acquire something of that holy likeness. What is the greatest, strongest, most generous and faithful human being beside the Divine Being presented to us in the Gospel ? "

The Jubilee had a sorrowful side. Two of the Sisters were very ill, and died before many months were over ; and to these sorrows was added the death of Madame Flore's own sister Aline. She had been a true Christian, and, at the age of seventy, daily visited the poor, and fasted rigorously during the whole of Lent. "My sister Aline made such a holy

death," writes Madame Flore, "that I cannot doubt she is in Heaven. A sweet thought that never leaves me, so I reproach myself for the least complaint. I love, on the contrary, to congratulate my pious sister on the happiness she enjoys, and which she greatly desired. Happy those who can say like her, when they are dying : ' I have known the Lord and served Him.' "

In the course of time, thirty pupils—boarders and day-scholars—had assembled in the house which the Sisters had taken at Scarborough, and it became necessary to look for a larger one.

Their friends had long recommended to them one, with land adjoining, which bore the name of the Bowling-green. A first visit disappointed them. The building was old, and in a very dilapidated state; every style of architecture seemed to be united in it; and the rooms presented that difference of level, which apparently was the dream of sixteenth century architects, in England as elsewhere. Moreover, the proprietor had become mentally incapable of managing her affairs, and the property was heavily mortgaged; several paths had been made across the

garden, and the lawn—a beautiful lawn, planted with trees, hundreds of years old—was used as the exercising-ground of a corps of police-ambulance, who came every day to practise.

The spectacle was tragic. A signal was given, and ten or twenty men fell down on the spot, supposed victims of criminal attacks. A second signal, and ten or twenty others—policemen, supposed to be on night duty—arrived, as it were, accidentally on the scene of the crime. They raised the mutilated bodies, with every kind of precaution prescribed by the regulations, and carried them away on stretchers. This done, the doleful manœuvre was finished, and they began again; and all this with that imperturbable British gravity which gives reality to make-believe. In addition to these somewhat depressing scenes, it was the popular belief that the house was haunted, a belief resting on legends, which had grown up from a basis of truth strangely distorted. Madame Flore gave orders to postpone the purchase of the Bowling-green.

An attempt was then made to find a house near the sea, in the southern and fashionable part of the town; but here also difficulties

arose. The Town Council, rightly anxious to protect the splendid view on this side, had imposed harassing restrictions on architects, and it would have been impossible to erect a building suitable for a Convent. There was no choice but to fall back on the Bowling-green. Strange to say, on a second visit, the impression was almost favourable; the nuns had learned during the interval, that the partial right of road, that had been acquired across the garden, could be legally done away with, without much difficulty, and, as for the ghost stories, none of the Sisters believed in them. There were several considerations in favour of the Bowling-green; it was near the Catholic Church, so that the parish priest would be able to serve the chapel; the situation was bracing; and there was ample space for enlargement at some future time; in one respect, indeed, it seemed as if Providence had especially prepared the house for them; twenty years before, the town had been compelled to build a wall 20 feet high to conceal a police station which overlooked the garden, and this wall would now serve as shelter and enclosure for the nuns. Further delay occurred; the owner being under the guardianship of trustees, no

part of her house property could be sold, without consent of the Court of Chancery. At last, in July 1884, the documents were signed, and the agent hastened to carry the good news to the nuns; it was the hour of Benediction, and they poured out their thanksgivings before the Blessed Sacrament.

To the nuns' great regret, the grave and prudent priest, the Reverend Provost Walker, died three years after their arrival at Scarborough; it is related that a few hours before his death he said: "What will become of my good nuns at Scarborough?" He left them, among other souvenirs, a beautiful missal, which he had used on Festivals. He was succeeded by Canon Dolan, of whose kindness to the Ladies of Mary Madame Flore speaks in the highest terms.

We have passed over many details of her last visit to England, in order not to interrupt the narrative. Her daughters had found her much changed; she was no longer "the swallow of other years," as she pathetically expressed it. Returning from the Bowling-green, she sank down, overpowered with fatigue. "I have done all that is necessary," she said, with the air of one who had begun a work dear to her

heart, but felt that she must leave the execution of it to others. When the time came for her to leave Scarborough, she gave a long look of affection to each of her daughters, evidently feeling that she was taking leave of them for the last time, and she accepted with apparent indifference, marks of reverence, which in other days she would have rejected.

At Croydon, where she broke her journey, the girls were inconsolable at the sad change they saw in her, and some of them, forgetful of the rules, ran and placed themselves at a spot where she must pass, to bid her a second farewell ; it was touching to see these girls, on the entrance of life, bending reverently before one who had almost passed through it, and yet found strength to show her affection for them. As for the nuns, they begged her prayers, her blessing, any trifle that had belonged to her. Touched with so many marks of affection, Madame Flore could scarcely tear herself from them, and after she had crossed the threshold, she turned and gazed long at the Convent she must never more re-enter.

The journey was a painful one ; she had placed herself on deck at the stern of the



PLAYGROUND—CONVENT OF THE LADIES OF MARY, COIOMA, CROYLON.

[To face page 222.

vessel, rain and mist obliged her to change her position ; shivering with cold and breathless, she dragged herself with tottering steps into shelter, and sank down on a bench. It happened to be a first-class part of the vessel, and when the official came to claim the extra payment, she would have risen, but her companion detained her, and paid the difference. During the railway journey, it seemed doubtful whether she would live to the end ; her fellow passengers were most compassionate ; a lady divested herself of her furs to cover her, and further on, a gentleman did the same with his overcoat, which he laid over her feet, in spite of her gentle remonstrance. She recovered a little as she drew near Coloma, and, after a few days of rest and care, she seemed almost restored to her usual health. She now wished to visit the other Convents, Mouscron and Alost, where she was expected. Her daughters vainly entreated her to postpone the journey ; probably she felt that if she did so, it would never be undertaken.

Declining the services of a lay-sister, she set out with no other companion than one of the elder pupils, who thus describes the journey :
“ It was made without much fatigue. One of

the windows of the carriage was lowered, and a gentle breeze played upon our faces. Our Mother was entirely occupied with me, drawing my attention to the rich valleys of Flanders. . . . I noticed with what animation she spoke, asking me the cause of their fertility, and seeming to derive a new life from these intellectual subjects ; but what I admired most of all, was the care she took to rise from this earthly beauty to the beauty of Heaven . . . from time to time the belfry of a church emerged from the verdure, or the golden fields . . . then my mistress would recollect herself and pray for a moment, or would utter some pious exclamation : ‘ How kind is Jesus to dwell among us ! ’ or, ‘ Let us send our Guardian Angels to salute Our Lord.’ There was an aged woman in the carriage, whose face bore traces of great trouble, and who was devoutly saying her rosary . . . at last she reverently touched Madame Flore, and said : ‘ Pardon, Madame, I would ask you to say a little Ave Maria for me, I am so much tried.’ ‘ I will do so, Madame,’ our Mother answered gently. . . . As we approached Mouscron, the new bell of the Convent sounded the Angelus ; Madame Flore raised

her head to listen, and I looked at her with emotion, thinking how many recollections the bell would bring to her mind. . . .” When she reached the Convent, the nuns received her with the most tender veneration; they thought her almost well, and surrounded her with filial care, so that she exclaimed, “Our state of life is a very happy one; I am overwhelmed with attentions and strengthening joys, which ought to restore me to health.”

Suffering seemed to bring out her courage, and the nuns never remembered to have seen in her so much humility, and submission to the will of God; over all contradictions there reigned a calm, free from passion or trouble. Her mind never lost its alacrity and vigour, and she retained her old firmness of direction. One of her old pupils had greatly desired to be a nun, but circumstances had rendered it impossible. Like a lily among thorns, she was an example of piety and virtue in the world, but she was not happy; the thought of what she had failed to obtain often brought tears to her eyes. Madame Flore was able to draw her out of this state of despondency.

The girl herself describes the interview: “After I had told my troubles, she said,

with the frankness she always used when speaking to me, 'Stay, what you are losing—you with your impressionable nature—is a chimera.' I looked up a little annoyed, I must own, to hear her express this opinion. 'A chimera!' I repeated warmly. 'Unquestionably a chimera,' she continued, paying no attention to my annoyance, 'look what you are doing, you are calling up dreams, tender recollections, you are taking delight in a past, which your imagination peoples with dear forms. But is there not earthly feeling in all this? Take my advice, give up these agitating dreams, live in the real.'

"'Oh! the real! the real!' I exclaimed, with a keen sense of bitterness. 'I am living only too much in the real, I am plunged in it up to the neck.' 'Without accepting your lot to live in it, is it not so? Now this is the point we must come to. Accept the real, where God wills that you should be, and reject the ideal, where He wills that you should not be. Do this, and you will be happy.' She would not let me go till I had promised to follow her advice, and I kept my word. . . ."

On the 11th June, Madame Flore passed on to Alost, and then returned to Coloma. "I am

better here than anywhere else," she said ;
"solitude and retirement delight me."

The day after her arrival, the post brought two letters ; one from an old pupil announcing her engagement, the other from her friends begging Madame Flore to use her influence to dissuade her from the projected marriage. Soon the girl herself arrived, radiant with happiness. Madame Flore listened to her tale without interruption, then she said : "And the most important thing of all, my child, his principles?" "Ah! Madame, principles! Where do you find young people trouble about them!" "But still?" "He does not share my faith." "A grave, a very grave subject for reflection." "Oh! do not be afraid ; I will bring him back." "You will bring him back! Naïve that you are! . . . It is not you that will bring him back, but you that will be dragged with him. But, my dear N——, have you ever considered what will be your life together without unity of belief? Two souls bound together who cannot agree on great questions ; who do not take their stand on the same conscience and religion. You will have no resource but either to be silent, or to quarrel," and seeing that the girl had become very thoughtful, "Is

there no way of putting it off, of gaining time?" she urged. "Is the contract signed?" "Oh, no, as far as that goes." "Then put off this marriage, give yourself time for reflection. You are now under the fascination of youth, the dreams of love carry you away . . . but when the real side of life comes, when age comes, and eternity draws near, what seems now such a little thing, will make you shudder." So well in fact did Madame Flore put before her the misery of such a marriage, that the girl broke off her engagement, and events proved that it was well she did so.

Madame Flore congratulated her: "You have given up your intended marriage. God be praised! . . . An unbeliever, a free-thinker, could he have made you happy! He would have brought about your misery and eternal loss, by depriving you of your faith. . . . God has shown how much He loves you in sparing you this misfortune, and He has given me too a sweet consolation in my declining years. My health is failing more every day. If not on earth, I hope at least from yonder, on high, I may see you happy in a Christian marriage."

IX

ILLNESS AND DEATH OF MADAME FLORE,
AUGUST 1885 TO 9TH FEBRUARY 1886

THE day of the School Fête drew near, but the nuns, as they made their preparations, were filled with anxiety, the Mother-General was growing rapidly weaker. The Fête began hopefully, but when Madame Flore rose to say grace, she was seized with faintness, and obliged to sit down; after dinner a succession of old pupils came to see her, and at three o'clock, as she was leaving the parlour to return to the community-room, she sank down in the corridor, seized with hæmorrhage of the lungs. She was anxious that nothing should mar the happiness of the children, so the Fête was continued; the nuns dared not speak, lest their voices should betray their emotion, and went about their work in silence.

The next day, although there was no im-

mediate danger, it was thought well to administer Extreme Unction. Madame Flore had been forbidden to speak, for fear of a return of the hæmorrhage, but before receiving the Holy Viaticum, she expressed a wish to say a few words, and asked pardon of the Sisters for any painful recollections she might have left with them. After dinner, she did the same to the Ladies of her Council, thanked them for their help, and trusted that they would continue to give it to the nun who would soon succeed her. Holding out her hand to them, she said: "The concord that has always reigned among us is a favour for which I thank God. May Jesus, Mary, and Joseph reward you!"

Ten days later, the Chapter met for the election, which had been fixed for 17th August 1885. Every one expected that Madame Flore would take the initiative, and resign her office; but, confident that she would not be re-elected, she preferred to be deposed according to the Rules. Madame Raphael, a nun for whom she had always felt a deep affection, was chosen to succeed her. As the members of the Chapter were leaving Coloma, Madame Flore bade them farewell, and added some last

words of advice: "Live a life of sacrifice. Resist the tendency of the age to comfort. Place your refuge and hope in God. Cling firmly to the observance of the Rule."

Before the close of August, the Annual Retreat was given, and happily Madame Flore was sufficiently recovered to be able to take part in it. Often one or other of the nuns would join her, in her little room near the chapel, and the time passed quickly in spiritual conversation. The greater part of her life had been spent in childlike trust in the Divine mercy, but during this Retreat, and for a few weeks longer, her mind was troubled by the thought of Purgatory and of the enormity of sin. One of her daughters reminded her that the nature of the sufferings endured in Purgatory had not been defined by the Church, and added: "In any case, Purgatory is not for you, who have lived so holily." "I lived so holily!" exclaimed Madame Flore, "O my God! Thou knowest what my holiness has been—a shadow! a phantom! After my death, say that my soul is in need of prayers, and give me some," and, turning to the Sister, she added, with a vehemence that brought the colour to her

pale cheeks, "Listen, my child, do not let us speak of holiness, let us bend down our eyes, humbling ourselves for our sins, that alone is befitting to us."

For more than thirty years she had taught the Catechism to the children, and she now asked to be allowed to continue the work; which she did, until the close of November. "Look, Madame," one of the girls said afterwards, "it was here, on this very spot, that she gave us her last Catechism. She could no longer see. I went to open the door for her, she still smiled at me. . . . How pale and weak she looked! Since then I can never see that door without almost crying." A few days later, she asked that her papers should be brought to her—her notes on spiritual subjects and on literature. She went through them, destroying some of them, and giving the rest to one or other of the nuns. She took leave of the Associates of the Blessed Sacrament, and conversed especially with the Councillors of the work; noticing that one of them was somewhat elaborately dressed: "My child," she said, "Your body is a temple, do not spoil the architecture with these ornaments; be more simple."

As she grew weaker, her delicacy of conscience increased. "I am sorry I was impatient just now," she said to a nun who had been present when she answered her nurse rather sharply, "it is the illness, and not the invalid that is to blame, nevertheless I will ask her pardon." A relative, who was much attached to her, came to see her at a time when she was in great pain, and was rather coldly received. "Poor Celine!" she said afterwards, "to have come so far to see me, and be repaid with indifference! We sufferers are cruel sometimes."

Her brother Nestor, in spite of his eighty years, made a journey of thirty leagues to see her. She made an affectionate movement towards him, saying, "Ah! Nestor!" Then the smile on her face died away, but recovering herself she made him sit by her, and said quite simply: "My dear Nestor, this time it is death." He did not attempt to deceive her, and they talked affectionately together for a long time; the dying nun begged a blessing of her brother, and he in turn bent his white head beneath the hand of the sister whom he would only meet again in Heaven.

Often old pupils came to see her, but she

rarely consented, whether from love of solitude or fear of saddening them. "Excuse me to them," she would say, "they would carry away a painful impression of Coloma. Do you and the other Sisters entertain them."

"I isolate myself more and more," she writes, "in solitude without occupation. I should be much ashamed of this, and very uneasy, were I not driven to it by the failure of my powers."

Again she writes: "My dear Sister, I would gladly beg of you a little courage. Extreme weakness, joined to a cough and the infirmities of age, do not dispose us to Alleluia. Let us say it, in spite of all. My God, how good Thou art! All that Thou wilt is adorable! All Thy crosses are salutary! . . . Thou lovest me tenderly, even when Thou triest me."

On the Feast of St Flora a little entertainment had been arranged. "I was much fêted yesterday," she writes; "I think all united to divert me, and they succeeded. How happy it is to be so much beloved! I know well I owe it in great part to my invalid state. None the less, I am touched by the attentions I receive."

It had been the custom on this day to give a treat to the children of the poor school, and

this year Madame Raphael arranged for a plentiful repast to be given also to the women of the Sunday class; the girls who had made their first Communion had the pleasure of waiting on them. Madame Flore was told of the prayers that had been promised, and the candles that would be burned to obtain her recovery. "Oh! how good are the poor! I have always loved them, and done what I could for them." She stopped, and then added: "They are very great too. See how their greatness is unfolded in the Gospel: 'Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.'" "But are not we, too, the invited guests of Heaven?" interposed one of the nuns. "No doubt, but the poor have a better right than we. It is a prerogative of race. They are the most heavily burdened here, the most destitute; it is right that they should be the most rewarded. Oh yes," she continued with animation, "Jesus will not forget the companions of His poverty, the exalted in His Church. I think their glory will be great at the resurrection." She seemed to continue the conversation in her own mind, for presently she began to laugh, and said, "The poor will get to Paradise more nimbly than we," and

as her companion did not follow her thought, "I mean they will be without the luggage of riches, which burdens souls."

In proportion as she became too weak to work, reading and prayer became her favourite occupations. "Come, read me a little of the Bible," she would say, and every day the Sister read to her, slowly and at intervals, not to tire her. A book that had recently been published, also gave her pleasure. It was by the Rev. Father Castelein, and entitled *La première Page de Moïse et l'histoire de la terre*. The Sister who read it aloud, relates: "Sometimes I lost the thread of the argument, and read whole pages without understanding them. 'Dear Mother,' I used to say, 'I am not following it—it is Greek to me,' and the venerable invalid, who lay as if she were half asleep, would smile, and set me right, summing up in a few words the chapter that had escaped my attention."

Occasionally, Madame Flore would ask to have the newspaper read to her, and as she chose the articles herself, it was difficult to avoid those that would pain her—for example, some attack on religion or morals; in such cases, she often did not speak, but the tears ran down her cheeks.

At Christmas, prayers were said for her recovery, although she herself desired only that God's will should be done. The children showed extraordinary ardour, practising various forms of self-denial, and taking their place by turns in the church to pray for her. The next day she was better, and whether from conviction, or from sympathy with the children, she expressed a belief in the possibility of her recovery. "After all, a favourable reaction may set in. The good God has worked so many miracles . . . and besides, the illness was so sudden, the cure may be sudden too."

Madame Raphael told her about the Festival, and she listened to the details with pleasure; suddenly the sound of a Christmas hymn was heard, and one of the nuns entered, carrying the image of the Infant Jesus. "Oh! how beautiful!" Madame Flore exclaimed, "Jesus of Bethlehem . . . the Light of the World. . . . Oh! yes, He will renew all things. '*Behold I make all things new.*'"

On New Year's day, all the community visited her, and Madame Raphael offered their greetings. She said: "I have asked Our Lord to cure you as your New Year's gift." "Did you really ask that?" said

Madame Flore. "Have I not done well?" "Yes and no. Heaven is so beautiful. I am rather inclined for death."

On the Feast of the Purification (Candlemas-day) some novices took the veil; it was the first time that Madame Flore had been absent from a Clothing for thirty years. When the ceremony was over, the Mother-General brought the new Sisters to see her, and Madame Flore took each of them by the hand, and seemed never tired of looking at them, and sympathising with their happiness.

Little by little, the certainty of her approaching end had ceased to terrify the nuns, and they could talk quietly with her of her departure to another country. Sometimes, however, the sight of her extreme emaciation overcame them; then she would fix her eyes on them with a look of gentle reproach, calling upon them to despise physical death, and to look forward with greater faith to eternal life. "To die is to go to God," she once said; "so to die is not sad."

On Sunday, 7th February, she received Holy Communion, as she did now nearly every day; towards three o'clock she became almost unconscious, and remained so until eight

o'clock on the Tuesday morning, when the community were summoned, and Canon Stevens began the prayers for the dying. At the sound of his voice she opened her eyes, and looked round upon her kneeling daughters—it was a last farewell. She kissed the crucifix, and very gently breathed her last.

PRINTED BY
OLIVER AND BOYD,
EDINBURGH

